# A STUDY OF THE CENTRAL CHARACTERS IN THE NOVELS OF SAUL BELLOW

ALAN. G. RUNCIE B.A.(Hons)
UNIVERSITY OF STRATHCLYDE.

A thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of English Literature
University of Glasgow.



ProQuest LLC.
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 – 1346

Acknowledgements

I would first of all like to thank Professor Andrew Hook of the University of Glasgow, who supervised the research of which this thesis is the fruit. His comments were always helpful, his criticism always constructive, and his encouragement was most appreciated by me. Thanks go also to Dr.Andrew Noble of the University of Strathclyde, who first introduced me to Bellow's work in the shape of T*he Dean's December*.

I would like to thank the collective staff of the University of Glasgow Library, the Mitchell Library, and the National Library of Scotland, for all their assistance during the course of my research. A special message of gratitude must go to Mr.Bill Keys, an excellent typist, who has shown considerable stoicism in the face of having to read the whole thesis.

Finally and above all, I would like to thank my parents for bearing with me.

Abstract.

The thesis will contend that there has often been a critical tendency to ignore or mask the subtlety and complexity of Bellow's art in order that his work can be tailored to accord with preconceived notions about, and/or inchoate responses to, its nature.

This tendency has mainly found fulfillment in critical portrayals of Bellow as either a 'humanist' author or, (in more recent times) as its opposite, as a proponent of a despairing and negative vision. The thesis will demonstrate that neither position is adequate to a proper understanding of Bellow's fiction.

The thesis will show that it is the author's ambiguous narrative technique which precludes any classification or categorisation of Bellow's art. Moreover, it is this dualistic technique which defines the central characters' relationship not only to the writer, but also to the world in which the fictional hero lives. It is the essence of any main protagonist of a Bellow novel to find himself in a state of constant contradiction, in a condition of unending flux where polarities and paradoxes assail him.

The main body of the text will examine each of Bellow's ten novels in turn, and elucidate the primary characteristics of the central figures in order to show that not only do they remain unchanged throughout the course of each of the novels (finding themselves unable to embrace either a 'humanistic' or an 'anti-humanistic' philosophy), but also that this feature constitutes the unifying force in Bellow's fictional canon. And it is a feature which means that, paradoxically, the heroes find themselves not trapped in stasis, but existing in a complex and artistically vivid situation which is redolent of ambiguity.

Over the years, however, the heroes' dilemmas have become more and more focused on the contradictions that exist between the spiritual and material planes. The thesis

traces such a development down through the Bellow corpus and culminates in an examination of the latest trend in his fictional career, his adoption of the novella form, and what this means for the future direction of both the author's attention and his art.

Table of Contents

## Introduction - Neither a Clean nor a Dirty.

"People who stick labels on you
are in the gumming business."
Saul Bellow

Saul Bellow is not a neglected writer. Perhaps it might have been better for him if he were. For the more ill-judged additions there are to the vast critical industry which surrounds his work, the more does his art seem to recede into the background, obscured and misrepresented by the haze in which it is enveloped. This tendency reaches a nadir in the following:-

> Gloria Cronin and Gerhard Bach are currently negotiating a contract [...] for 'text and criticism' editions of *Herzog* and *Henderson the Rain King.* The proposed format of these editions reflects the present need for critical theory applied in classroom discourse [...] Possible critical perspectives are: new historicism, hermeneutics, cultural (anthropological) criticism, reader-response criticism, feminist criticism and deconstructionist criticism [...] This is an exciting new venture in Bellow studies ...[1]

It is tempting to characterize it more as a *depressing* new venture in Bellow studies. Indeed, it is all the more regrettable that such 'ideas' should come from those who avow enthusiasm for the author's work. They should be well aware of the antipathy which Bellow reserves for the distorting powers of such doctrinaire thinking:-

> The desire to read is itself spoiled by 'cultural interests', and by a frantic desire to associate everything with something else and to convert works of art into subjects of discourse.[2]

Moreover:-

> Art in the twentieth century is more greatly appreciated if it is directly translatable into intellectual interests, if it stimulates ideas, if it lends itself to discourse. Because intellectuals do not like to suspend themselves in works of the imagination. They prefer to talk. Thus they make theology and philosophy out of literature. They make

psychological theory. They make politics.[3]

One would hope that the earlier criticism is a grotesquely extreme example of 'discourse' (sounding as it does as if it could have come from the lips of Kenneth Trachtenberg, the manic theoretician of *More Die of Heartbreak*), but it nevertheless offers a clue to the error into which I believe much of the criticism of Saul Bellow falls. Intent on extracting whatever accords with their preconceived thesis from what can sometimes appear as the mere 'raw material' of the novels, critics often blind themselves to the subtleties, ambiguities and indeed blatant contradictions which can constitute an absolutely integral feature of the author's artistry and its effects. Essentially any attempt to classify or systematize Bellow will result - and *has* resulted -in an imperfect understanding of his craft.

The orthodox critical interpretation, at least for the first two-thirds of his career - and in some cases beyond - styles Bellow as a 'humanist'. The good intentions of those who hold to this view are not in question. However, the same cannot be said of many of their judgements. The first problem with this perspective lies in our understanding of the words 'humanist' and 'humanism'.[4] The dictionary defines 'humanism' as a "belief or attitude emphasising common human needs and seeking solely rational ways of solving human problems".[5] Michael Glenday, an opponent of the humanist stance on Bellow, states that "humanism finds its strength in the participative and interactive, and contends that the dignity of man and the survival of humane sensibility can only be achieved through the social contract. It is this humanism which has so often been perceived as a fundamental part of the Bellow world."[6] Such a perception is crystallised in the view of Malcolm Bradbury, who stated, apropos of Bellow being given the Nobel Prize for Literature, that the award "meant to recognise that Bellow, in a time when the humanistic development of the

novel form had come under severe questioning, was ready to express and speak for its humanistic purposes."[7]

But the foregoing definitions of 'humanism' , whilst clearly inapplicable to Bellow's later novels (for the reasons that their terms of reference neither encompass the range of Bellow's art *nor* do they respond to a fiction where a supposed 'humanistic' outlook lies *outside* the domain of the human), are also, I would aver, inappropriate with regard to his earlier work. Whether, for instance, either *The Victim* or *Seize the Day* could in the light of such definitions be characterized as evincing a 'humanist' view is extremely debatable. The rendering of character in both, as in all of Bellow's novels, is too complex for such strictures, too subtle and to prone to fluctuation. The optimistic affirmation which is invariably the bedfellow of 'humanism' depends for its existence on the 'correct' interpretation of the highly ambiguous dénouements to the novels - an interpretation fraught with pitfalls. Moreover, a further problem for the 'humanist' stance is the quasi-religious element which pervades Bellow's canon - the "kind of mysticism"[8] to which the author has made reference. And finally, the humanist perspective hinges to a large extent on whether Bellow ultimately gives full 'endorsement' to the views of his central protagonists (views which, in any case, cannot be easily distilled to coincide with *any* philosophy). I shall return to this very point later in this section. In the meantime, it should be noted that the author himself has declined to be pigeon-holed in the preceding fashion:-

> 'Humanism' is one of the words which have deservedly fallen into disrepute. I am not certain that I would accept your use of it, because I don't actually know what you mean by it.[9]

More recently, some critics have dissented from the humanist interpretation of Bellow's work (although some of the humanist critics had beforehand begun to

despair of the author) John J.Clayton, after comparing Bellow to reactionary politicians like Spiro Agnew and George Wallace on the publication of *Mr.Sammler's Planet*, expressed the hope that "Bellow returns to the planet he used to share with us"[10] - and the "phalanx and phalanstery atmosphere"[11] permeating *Humboldt's Gift* led to further consternation). Jonathan Wilson highlights some valid points with regard to the humanist approach:-

> While it may sound perverse of me to take issue with critics for finding a writer 'life-affirming', I do so because I believe it is a misreading that has obfuscated Bellow's fictive complexity.[12]

and:-

> Bellow's 'best men' are always extremely eccentric or peripherally criminal.[13]

True enough, but Wilson compromises his thesis somewhat by escorting us up the Freudian blind alley (a blind alley because the suggestion that "Bellow's novels [...] finally reveal far more to us about their author"[14] surely does more damage to 'fictive complexity' than anything else), and by the recurrent tone of iconoclasm for its own sake (it might also be borne in mind that Bellow's 'worst men' - Tamkin, Gersbach, Spangler and the like - all possess redeeming features).

Michael Glenday's study provides the apotheosis of what might be termed the 'anti-humanist' position. Glenday's belief is that the novels involve "Bellow's rejection of the humanist ethic. His heroes are humanists *manqué*, rejected and defeated by an American ethos so inimical to their basic human needs that they are forced to adapt various strategies of withdrawal".[15] The problem with this argument is that it tends

to degenerate into a 'seek and ye shall find' operation, where pessimism and bleakness can be encountered at almost every turn. One finishes by sounding like Nietzsche's 'gloomy prophet', the caricature of Schopenhauer, whose fruits have all turned rotten and brown:-

> There are surely occasions when optimism can strike us as shallow, as a manifestation of weakness rather than strength or mettle.[16]

Taken in the context of Glenday's thesis, this comment (which I have no doubt Bellow would agree with on its own merits) becomes a distorting weapon, obscuring many important points with the insistence on creating the current of *Weltschmerz* supposedly running through the novels. In any case, Glenday seems to contradict his contention that there is a *decline* of humanism in Bellow's work, by portraying *The Victim* and *The Adventures of Augie March*, two of the earliest novels, as among the bleakest in the canon. In essence, those in the 'anti-humanist' camp ultimately fall into the same trap as their humanist counterparts - Bellow's novels simply do not conform to rigid prescriptions or formulae. Those in the former school would do well to heed Bellow's injunction that "no one should found his nay upon the study of literature".[17]

It will be evident that both the humanist and the anti-humanist views depend to a large extent for their existence on the predisposition of the critic. The author, for his part, has made several references to the invalidity of both approaches:-

> The idiocy of orthodox affirmation and transparent or pointless optimism ought not to provoke an equal and opposite reaction.[18]

and:-

Pessimism, no less than optimism, can be made into a racket.[19]

and:-

Nihilists and bien pensants are equally nutty.[20]

Such comments can lead us to a closer understanding of Bellow's art. Since the example of Joseph in *Dangling Man*, many observers have commented on the tendency of the Bellow hero to do just what the title of his first novel suggests - to 'dangle'. That is to say, the hero appears to be defined by his occupation of the middle ground between contradictory forces: rationalism and feeling, flesh and spirit, external and internal reality, salvation and despair. I do not dispute the existence of this feature for a moment - indeed, I seek to develop and enlarge upon it. The point over which I take issue with perhaps the majority of Bellow's critics is over the desire to find a closure, a resolution, a definitive ordering of the turmoil in which the central protagonists exist. This desire often gravitates, as has been mentioned, in the direction of affirmative 'humanism', or in the direction of the pessimistic withdrawal of anti-humanism. It is my contention that there is no conclusion to the 'dangling' process - no state of grace, no transcendence, not even any despairing retreat. The Bellow hero continues in this strange limbo, a state of indeterminacy, which, it must be stressed, implies no other associations - it simply *is*.

I think we can identify two main reasons for this state of affairs. The first lies in Bellow's comment about what he sees as the greatest expression of the art of the novel:-

Here we see the difference between a didactic novelist like D.H. Lawrence and one like Dostoyevsky. When he was writing *The Brothers Karamazov* and had just ended

the famous conversation betwen Ivan and Alyosha, in which Ivan, despairing of justice, offers to return his ticket to God, Dostoyevsky wrote to one of his correspondents that he must now attempt, through Father Zossima, to answer Ivan's arguments. But he has in advance all but devastated his own position. This, I think, is the greatest achievement possible in a novel of ideas. It becomes art when the views most opposite to the author's own are allowed to exist in full strength [...] The opposites must be free to range themselves against each other, and they must be passionately expressed on both sides ...[21]

Alyosha, of course, comes to reject Ivan's "rebellion", and sides with the prescriptions of Father Zossima, whose "pious platitudes" as David Magarshack rightly observes, "are never as convincing as Ivan's blasphemies".[22] With Bellow, a similar, but not identical process takes place. The author certainly gives full rein to the representation of polarised ideas. But the Bellow hero is ultimately unable to embrace *either* position - thus the peculiar 'middle ground' in which he finds himself. It is my belief that this inability is a direct result of Bellow's singular use of irony - the second, interrelated reason for the nature of his art.

As was noted earlier, the question of Bellow's relationship to his central characters is one that those on the humanist camp tend to skirt around, since a deeper examination would compromise their conclusions. Even the more subtle in this group, who can recognise some of the inherent contradictions and paradoxes of the Bellow hero (like John J.Clayton), nevertheless decide that these are not enough to prevent an acceptance of the 'humanist ideal' by the protagonist. Adherents of the contrary viewpoint are alive to the ironic portrayal - but only when it suits the purposes of their overall theme (Glenday, for instance, argues the case for an ironic portrayal of characters like Augie and Henderson, but sees little of this in the more ostensibly negative Sammler). Bellow's use of irony is more intricate. Norman Podhoretz, in a hostile review of *The Adventures of Augie March*, comments:-

Mr.Bellow is no doubt poking fun at his narrator [...] through mimicry, but we are supposed to be taking what Augie says very seriously [...] The main effect of the mimicry is to give Mr.Bellow an out (he *knows* what sort of character his narrator is),not to qualify our response to Augie in any significant way. This kind of trick we are familiar with from Auden's early poetry, in which self-mockery becomes an excuse for the self-indulgent refusal to make up his mind.[23]

Podhoretz goes on to accuse Bellow of "standing off with an equivocal neutrality very far from the detachment he's after."[24] This is a trifle harsh, but it is closer to the actuality of Bellow's narrative technique than seen so far. Stephen Tanner brings us even closer:-

Treating the big issues with comedy and irony and putting his convictions in the mouths of characters who are quirky and often preposterous had allowed Bellow over the years to insinuate his ideas and values without having to be directly accountable for them to a critical audience that would readily attack them if they were openly asserted.[25]

Whether we would agree with Tanner that Bellow has 'insinuated' his ideas is a matter for debate. What Tanner has noticed, however, is what constitutes for me the essential feature of the artistry of Bellow - the almost simultaneous endorsement and undercutting of the central characters by the author. It is this characterstic, I believe, which leads to the lack of closure, which accounts for the 'medial' nature of Bellow's heroes. It is a characteristic altogether unlike the ironic portrayal in, say, the tales of Poe, wherein the author, by varying degrees of subtlety, exposes the limitations and shortcomings of his narrators, demonstrating the untrustworthy nature of their rationale, in effect pulling the carpet from under their feet. It is a characteristic which has more affinities with the likes of James's narrator of *The Bostonians*, in that the supercilious commentator is himself prone to ridicule. But even then it is not the

same. The reader of Bellow must be aware of the constant, subtle, and often totally unexpected and incongruous shifts in the perspectives in which the central characters are held - they are just as likely to be buffoons as heroes, mixing searing insight with a host of inconsistencies and contradictions. This technique means that the Bellowprotagonists are some of the most complex and difficult to unravel in fiction. I said earlier that the Bellow heroes find themselves in the 'middle ground' - this is so. And by means of such fluid and ambiguous portrayal of character, the author shows that the desideratum of the hero, that which will release him from his 'dangling', is of necessity unattainable - and just as false as a surrender to the "cheap mental stimulants of Alienation, the cant and rant of pipsqueaks about Inauthenticity and Forlorness".[26] The heroes may dangle in the middle ground - but they would be imprisoned in either of these extremes. Bellow always stops short of absolutes - he affirms, but qualifies; he undercuts, but redeems. It is this tendency which makes the predicament of the hero both comic and twentieth-century tragic. It is this characteristic, which, after fifty years, remains the essential and unchanging feature of the Bellow central character. His work displays "a view too complicated to be reducible to a philosophical proposition, too dialectical and contradictory to be taken as dogma, creed or panacea. Its central feature is, in fact, ambiguity, a recognition of elements which may be forever irreconcilable".[27] "We may," says Bellow, "be somewhere between a false greatness and a false insignificance".[28] A salutory warning to those in the gumming business.

References

The title of this chapter refers to a division of modern novelists made by Bellow (in 'The Writer as Moralist', *Atlantic*, March 1963), into 'Cleans' -. conservative and easily optimistic - and 'Dirties' - the nay-sayers and image breakers.

The epigraph is taken from:

Kakutani, Michiko: 'A Talk with Saul Bellow: on his work and himself', *New York Times Book Review*, 13 December, 1981, pp1,28,31 (p.28).

1 Extract from the 'Saul Bellow Society Newsletter', November 1990, Volume 5, No.1

2 Bellow, Saul: 'Machines and Storybooks: Literature in the Age of Technology', *Harper's*, August 1974, pp48-59, (p.59).

3 ibid, p.54.

4 In the absence of precision, critics of this persuasion can fall back on a time-honoured phrase: "This essay has been deliberately titled, 'Quest for the Human' for it seeks to make the reader aware of a threefold quest for humanness. It will examine each of Bellow's eight novels to demonstrate that the Bellow protagonist is always in search of the human. The novels clearly suggest that they are projections of Bellow's own arduous climb towards true humanness. Each novel marks a stage of the Himalayan ascent, the quest and the humanness manifesting themselves in richer and increasingly complex forms." - Rodrigues, Eusebio: *Quest for the Human*, Bucknell University Press, Lewisburg, 1981, p10.

5 The Oxford Dictionary of Current English, Oxford University Press, 1985.

6 Glenday, Michael: *Saul Bellow and the Decline of Humanism*, MacMillan Press, Basingstoke, Hants., 1990, p7.

7 Bradbury, Malcolm: *Saul Bellow*, Methuen, London and New York, 1982, p20.

8 Henry, Jim Douglas: 'Mystic Trade: Saul Bellow talks to Jim Douglas Henry', *The Listener*, 22 May, 1969, pp705-707 (p.707).

9 Bragg, Melvyn: 'Saul Bellow talks about his new novel', *London Review of Books*, 6-19 May, 1982, p.22.

10 Clayton, John: *In Defence of Man*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1968, Postscript to the second edition cited in Wilson, Jonathan: 'On Bellow's Planet', Associated University Press, Cranbury, New Jersey, 1985, p.16.

11 Poe's sour comment on the atmosphere of New England transcendentalism in his review, 'Tale writing - Nathaniel Hawthorne'. "Phalanx" and "Phalanstery" refer to the

community at Brook Farm where Hawthorne lived until 1861. Cited from McIntosh, James, ed.: *Nathaniel Hawthorne's Tales*, Norton Books, New York, 1987, p.335.

[12] Wilson: *On Bellow's Planet*, p.16.

[13] ibid, p.19.

[14] ibid, p.26.

[15] Glenday: *Saul Bellow and the Decline of Humanism*, p.11.

[16] ibid, p.62.

[17] Bellow, Saul: 'The writer as Moralist', *Atlantic*, March 1963, pp58-62, (p.61)

[18] ibid, p.61.

[19] Bellow, Saul: 'Where do we go from here: The Future of Fiction' in Malin, Irving ed.: *Saul Bellow and the Critics*, New York University Press, 1967, pp211-220, (p.215).

[20] Roudané, Matthew C.:'Interview with Saul Bellow' *Contemporary Literature*, 25.3 (1984), pp265-280, (p.272).

[21] Bellow, Saul: 'The Future of Fiction', p.220. In this respect one also thinks of George Steiner's *The Portage to San Cristobal of A.H.*, which has a final chapter comparable in force to that in *The Brothers Karamazov* which outlines Ivan's act of "rebellion".

[22] Magarshack, David: 'Introduction' to *The Brothers Karamazov*, Penguin Classics, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, 1958, ppxi-xiii, (p.xxiii).

[23] Podhoretz, Norman: 'The Language of Life' in Trachtenberg, Stanley, ed.: *Critical Essays on Saul Bellow*, G.K.Hall & Co., Boston, Mass.,1979, pp14-18, (p.15).

[24] ibid, p.16.

[25] Tanner, Stephen L: Review of *More Die of Heartbreak* in *The Saul Bellow Journal*, Volume 7, No1, p.76.

[26] Bellow, Saul: *Herzog*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, 1965, p.75.

[27] Aldridge, John W: 'Saul Bellow at 60: A Turn to the Mystical', in Trachtenberg, *C.E.S.B.*, pp49-54, (p.51).

[28] Bellow, Saul: 'The Sealed Treasure', *Times Literary Supplement*, 1 July, 1960, p.414.

## Chapter One

### *Dangling Man* - Drowning in Freedom

"Just try giving us, for example, as much independence
as possible, untie the hands of any one of us, loosen
our bonds and we [...] I assure you we should all
immediately beg to go back under discipline."
Dostoyevsky: *Notes from underground*

"What a Difference between Freedom and Ownness!"
Max Stirner: *The Ego and His Own.*

Without wishing to seem to be immediately contradicting the assertions made in the introductory section, one must say that critics have, for the most part, put on protective gloves when dealing with Bellow's first novel, *Dangling Man.* Wary of committing themselves too fully, their path throughout this work has often been a cautious and diffident one. This is especially the case on the humanist side of the equation, though the phenomenon also manifests itself on the opposing side. If nothing else, this is due to the associations implied in the title itself! More properly, it is due, first, to the nature and complexity of the portrayal of Joseph, the central character and narrator. In the light of the fact that Joseph's narrative takes the form of a personal journal (which ran the risk of being deemed too restrictive and limited a viewpoint) such a portrayal is testimony to the nascent ability of Bellow. And, second, the critics' care is a result of the extremely ambiguous and controversial conclusion to the novel (a feature which is, as has been mentioned, common to all of Bellow's work). Bearing this tendency of critics in mind, then, it becomes all the more surprising to note that the degree of circumspection awarded to *Dangling Man* is not reproduced on anything like this scale in the treatment of later novels. For it seems to me that Joseph is the quintessential Bellow hero - perhaps lacking the experiences of an Augie, the activity of a Henderson, or simply not as interesting as a Sammler or Corde - but he establishes the framework into which all of the later

chief characters will fit: that of the nebulous middle-ground. It is just because Joseph is such an archetype that critics of any and every persuasion will benefit from a spot of 'dangling' themselves.

Michael Glenday, in taking issue with those of humanist hue, states that, "*Dangling Man* seems to finish with no [such] affirmation and thereby becomes a source of discomfiture to critics bent on such a reading [...] to be dismissed [...] or simply ignored altogether."[1] This is only a partly valid point. Although one critic of this persuasion asseverates that the novel is "clearly not a fictional achievement"[2], it would be patently unjust to stigmatise all of the commentators who are "bent on such a reading." The worst that can be said about these latter is that there appears to be a slight inclination on their behalf to attribute any uncomfortable features which appear in the novel to Bellow's supposed tentativeness, or even immaturity, manifesting themselves as he embarked on his writing career. Far from dismissing or ignoring the novel, the response of the "humanist" school has tended to be, as I have said, a cagey and ambivalent one (Glenday himself may be familiar with this tendency - "But though the cruel irony of the novel's conclusion appears to signal Joseph's absolute renegation of that freedom he had formerly prized so highly, the pessimism of all this is mitigated by certain factors."[3]) Thus it is that John J. Clayton avers that "Joseph is a humanist"[4] and that "he defends traditional humanistic values [...] individuality, moral integrity, brotherhood: the individual and humanity joined by love."[5] Yet this is qualified by the acknowledgement that "his humanism is not viable in Chicago, but he tries throughout to sustain it"[6] and that "Humanism of any traditional kind [...] is insufficient."[7] Robert Dutton sees Joseph in possession of "an honest and alert mind more nearly allied to the angelic than to the demonic"[8], and as typifying the Bellow hero, who must "break through to life and [...] achieve [their] possibilities [...] without the loss of a moral and intellectual

humanism basic to their views of themselves."[9] But he recognises that Joseph's 'dangling' produces a "severe modification of this humanistic self."[10] Even Eusebio Rodrigues divines that "this modern man dangles precariously, clinging, however, to a slim thread of hope and faith in human existence."[11] I return to Robert Dutton to provide the most accurate summation of the humanist position regarding *Dangling Man*: "There is little doubt that *Dangling Man* is a story of failure and defeat [...] though his [Joseph's] struggle is not without nobility."[12] The consensus view appears to be that Joseph's humanism derives from his coming to embody a laudable stoicism (presaging, incidentally, the potted philosophy of Schlossberg in *The Victim* - a "desperate affirmation", to use John J. Clayton's phrase).

Jonathan Wilson, in opposing the merest hint of a humanist reading, makes a couple of telling remarks with regard to the novel:

> What *Dangling Man* and Bellow's other novels seem to insist upon is that a choice be made. Paradoxically, they also seem to insist that such a choice is impossible to make.[13]

and:-

> Bellow's heroes come through some kind of personal crisis, but there is rarely any convincing hint that they have broken a pattern.[14]

I agree with both of these comments. Where I take issue with Wilson's thesis is over the implication that the 'dangling' state is necessarily bleak, alienating and life-denying. Quite the reverse is true: it is the hero's inability to grasp, or succumb to, the conflicting tensions which populate his experience that animates Bellow's fiction. What Wilson portentously calls Bellow's "static dialectic", a phenomenon which, in the opinion of the former, "would appear to fundamentally contradict the

sense of open-ended human possibility that so many critics have discovered in Bellow's fiction"[15], in fact describes the very process by which the hero *lives* - in the protean middle-ground experience is manifold, uncertainty and contradiction abound - there is nothing 'static' in this environment. Peace or decay, tranquility or vegetation can only occur in the realm of certainties. The fact that the hero does not seem to go through any change in his 'dangling' state merely reinforces the point that, were he to do so, it would be this metamorphosis which would constitute a denial of life. The Bellow hero, and there is no better example than Joseph, does not, will not, cannot go this way.

Joseph, then, is no disciple of the 'preachers of death'. Yet it would be a mistake to accept the humanist interpretation, shaky and hesitant though this may be. For it seems to me that Joseph is ill-equipped to be a representative of 'humanism' as described, for instance, by Clayton. The ostensible reason for Joseph's 'dangling' is the delay in his induction to the army. The major philosophical theme underlying the material 'dangling' is the spiritual 'dangling' between freedom and fixity, life and death. There is, however, a third sense in which Joseph 'dangles' - in the continual and bizarre oscillations in his personality. Keith Opdahl is of the view that "We are too conscious of Joseph's self-deception to trust his self-knowledge. The result of this confusing shift is [...] we are never sure how to take Joseph's journal entries."[16] The confusion Opdahl cites stems, of course, from what I believe to be the outstanding feature of Bellow's style - that curious co-existence of approbation and irony, as outlined in my introduction. The lineage of this author/character relationship can be traced from the prototype of Joseph down through Bellow's corpus (reaching its zenith in the likes of Moses Herzog and Kenneth Trachtenberg). The comparison which was made earlier with the ironic style employed in Poe's 'psychological' tales is in this case doubly illuminating. Both authors make use of

only a single perspective. Both subject this perspective to ironic impairment. But whereas Poe's demented narrators expose their limitations and inconsistencies to such a degree that we can scarcely trust a word they say, Joseph's consciousness is in constant flux, shuttling between artless self-examination and penetrative but evanescent revelation - and the reader must be aware of both. Either Bellow is afraid to commit himself, as Stephen Tanner would have us believe, or, as I prefer to view it, the author, being fully in control of his material, is attempting to represent artistically both the joyous expectations and the foolish degradations of human beings caught between the opposing poles of an impossible ideal and an unacceptable despair. Bellow's technique can, as Opdahl notes, muddy the waters somewhat - it is designed to do just that - and it is central to an understanding of the 'dangling' condition, not only of Joseph, but of all Bellow's protagonists.

Joseph's perceptions and meditations on the nature of self and reality, and of freedom and constraint are ironically juxtaposed on several important occasions. Joseph distinguishes between two versions of his personality - the "Old" self, dominant in the days before his call-up and the "New" self which he claims has taken over since the ostensible inception of his 'dangling'. To this Old self, "amiable, generally takes himself to be well liked",[17] the concepts of "common humanity"[25], and "colony of the spirit [...] a group whose covenants forbade spite, bloodiness and cruelty"[39] seemed natural. His New Self harbours "bitterness and spite which eat like acids at my endowment of generosity and goodwill"[12]. Joseph avers that he underwent this change less than a year before - but we cannot believe that any such process took place at all. For, as Robert Dutton observes,[18] Joseph's behaviour before the supposed metamorphosis took place violently contradicts his self-image. Harry and Minna Servatius's party, at which Joseph divines the true nature of the putative members of his 'colony of the spirit' - "we did these things

without grace or mystery [...] and, relying on drunkenness, assassinated the Gods in one another and shrieked in vengefulness and hurt"[46] - takes place "last March" before his alleged conversion to the cynical peerer into the "craters of the spirit"[66]. His affair with Kitty, which he claims is "out of character"[101], not only undermines his avowed emphasis on love (his relationship with his wife is, to say the least, changeable), but also further subverts the notion of a recent schism in his personality, since the affair began two years previously. Furthermore, the rancorous split with the Communist Party occurred several years before (Joseph also surreptitiously mentions that he and his best friend Abt were "temporarily estranged because of a political matter" while at college[44]). Finally, the "disgraceful fist fight"[142] between Joseph and his ex-landlord happened "last winter". We are forced to the conclusion that Joseph's irritability and paranoia, comprising his 'dark side', have always been present, and that the concepts of "Old" and "New" selves are redundant (Joseph himself acknowledges the suspicion of an earlier incarnation of the 'dark side', recalling the incident in his childhood with the woman who compared him with Mephistopheles). None of this proves that Joseph is an incorrigible fiend (he admits, for instance, that "the treasons I saw at the Servatius party were partly mine"[147]) but serves to highlight his distance from what he styles his "ideal construction"[140].

Joseph describes himself as "a person greatly concerned with keeping intact and free from encumbrance a sense of his own being, its importance"[27]. He chafes at what he sees as the apparent disregard for him as a person, as a valued being. This annoyance is clearly displayed on several occasions, most notably in the incidents with ex-comrade Burns ("I have a right to be spoken to. It's the most elementary thing in the world"[33]); at Joseph's parents-in-law, where a random chicken feather in Joseph's glass of orange juice assumes vast metaphysical significance; and in the

exchange with the officious bank clerk (Joseph, incidentally, is incautious enough to comment that "Abt, more than anyone I have known, has lived continually in need of being consequential"[86)]. The point in this case is that Joseph is clearly unable to merit such regard, unable properly to sustain his individual freedom. From his early suspicions that "I do not know how to use my freedom [...] I have no resources - in a word, no character"[12], through to his agonising doubts about whether he has a "separate destiny"[168], Joseph flounders helplessly in an existential 'nothingness' - that he recognises this to be the case renders his excessive behaviour doubly ironic. In any case, Joseph's respect for the inviolability of the self does not, it would seem, extend either to the treatment of his wife, Iva, whom he tries relentlessly to regiment (and is shocked when she rebels), or to his Albee-esque alter-ego, Vanaker, for whom he feels a mixture of loathing and fear. Joseph, failing to manage his freedom, reveals his relief in the ironic exuberance of his final entry, written immediately prior to his passage into the 'ordered' world of the armed forces:-

> I am no longer to be held accountable for myself; I am grateful for that. I am in other hands, relieved of self-determination, freedom cancelled.
> Hurrah for regular hours!
> And for the supervision of the spirit!
> Long live regimentation![191]

So much for freedom. This does not, however, mean that "Joseph is joining not only the army but the human race"[19]. Several factors militate against such a conclusion. In the first place, it is doubtful whether such a flawed individual would perform any better in the generality than in the self. Second, are we to believe that Joseph's desire for fraternity, for a 'colony of the spirit' is to be met at a point where the human brotherhood is engaged in blowing each other to smithereens? The war, with its millions of dead, paradoxically undermines the notions both of brotherhood *and* self. And third, it is difficult to credit that the revulsion occasioned in Joseph's

consciousness by his friends, relatives and wife will not resurface within this larger fellowship. His nightmarish epiphanies will see that it does.

Further examples underline Joseph's confused imperfection. He complains of "my inability to read people properly, to recognise the likelihood of baseness in them"[78]. Yet for one so naive, he is morbidly suspicious, a characteristic particularly evinced when, after he has spanked his ill-mannered niece (with whom Joseph realises he bears certain affinities), he imputes an outrageous hint of sexual suggestiveness to his sister-in-law (when in fact such a hint had existed only in his own mind). Similarly, when his mother-in-law innocently mentions that, due to the delay in his induction, Joseph has "all the time in the world"[22], the latter becomes indignant, suspecting the old woman of all sorts of vicious motives designed to disgrace him. In addition to such a disposition, he is made to look foolish when, immediately subsequent to a contemplative mood in which he exhorts himself to bear"suffering and humiliation[...]with grace, without meanness"[67], he explodes at the obnoxious Etta. In all these ways, Joseph's ideal constructions are obscured behind the turbulence and volatility of his personality - to cast him, in this light, as a representative of even a modified of half-baked humanism would be difficult indeed.

The point is, of course, that Joseph's ideals are sincere because they *are* perforce ideals, forever jarring with unaccommodating reality. Between these two extremes spins the figure of Joseph. For it must not be forgotten that Joseph fights shy of any acceptance of "doctrines of weariness and renunciation."[20] Though he is a man constantly assailed by portents of Death (the man in the street who suffers a heart attack in front of Joseph, his doom-laden dreams, the 'Buster Brown curls' memory, the decrepit Christian Science woman), in his 'discussions' with 'the Spirit of

Alternatives' (scenes which, one suspects, owe more than a little to Ivan Karamazov and his Devil), Joseph explicitly rejects resignation - "You want me to worship the anti-life. I'm saying that there are no values outside life. There is nothing outside life"[165]. Moreover, he finds Goethe's *Weltschmerz* ultimately repellent - "Goethe's heading on the next page was 'Weariness of Life' [...] Then came the statement: 'Nothing occasions this weariness more than the recurrence of the passion of love. Deeply disappointed, I put the book down'"[18/19]. And he resists the temptation to lapse into dogmas of surrender - "I didn't say there was no feeling of alienation, but that we should not make a doctrine of our feeling"[138]. Even in the apparently downbeat conclusion (which one critic has described as "total failure[...]nakedly acknowledged"[21]), I believe there is no unconditional capitulation. Joseph certainly appreciates that "I had not done well alone"[190], but we have no reason to suppose that his induction means renunciation to the countervailing forces of limitation, partly because, as argued earlier, of the nature of his personality, but also because we have little cause to disbelieve his statement that, "I was willing to be member of the army but not a part of it"[133/134]. Joseph, it seems, will continue to dangle - for he has done so all of his life.

It is significant, in the light of the statement just noticed, that Joseph and the 'Spirit of Alternatives' never reach conclusions - as the Spirit says, "I haven't answered. I'm not supposed to give answers"[141]. For Joseph is destined to become the first in a long line of Bellow heroes who exist in "the gap between the ideal construction and the real world"[141]. In Joseph's case, the gulf is between the impossible aims of total freedom, a defined and inviolate self, a human fellowship based on love, and an unacceptable reality of stricture, insignificance and humiliation (though it should be emphasised that Joseph rejects *extreme representations* of reality - reality, *per se*, is not "unacceptable" - "Theories of a

wholly good or a wholly malevolent world strike him as foolish [...] For him the world is both and therefore it is neither"[29]). Tantalisingly, Bellow seems to offer a clue to provide at least one way of mitigating the 'dangling' process. It comes in the form of Joseph's artistic friend, Pearl, who posits the view that "There is only one worth-while sort of work, that of the imagination"[91].

Bellow has often touted the power of the creative process in interview and essay:-

> What I am saying is that the accounts of human existence given by the modern intelligence are very shallow by comparison with those that the imagination is capable of giving, and that we should by no means agree to limit imagination by committing ourselves to the formulae of modern intelligence.[22]

> It remains for writers and artists to recover what the ruling perceptions leave out. And this is what the imagination does. It restores what mutilating perception has cut away.[23]

It is Joseph's tragedy, however, that he recognises himself to be an artistically talentless man (perhaps typically, though, Bellow gently undercuts in artistic form what he has said in prosaic form by having Pearl write later to Joseph to complain that he is bored with his environment). Joseph, then, unable or unwilling to meet with resolutions or certainties of any kind, remains suspended in limbo - a limbo of pained emotions, anxieties, transient joys, hopeless desires - in short, the limbo of human life.

*Dangling Man* has rightly been compared with two works in particular: Sartre's *Nausea* and Dostoyevsky's *Notes from Underground*[24], and the influences, particularly of the last named, are fairly apparent. In the case of the former, and even though Bellow has often criticised Sartre in print (partly because Existentialism constitutes a part of a collective body of "thought" which "taken altogether [...] is a huge affliction. Its effects are deadly"[25], and partly because of

the Frenchman's political pronouncements), Joseph does seem to reflect an existential fluidity of being (precisely, of course, what he cannot cope with) in his quest for self-meaning, and to experience similar bouts of 'nausea' to Roquentin. Like the Man from Underground, Joseph is an intellectual festering in a corner, conscious of the wretchedness and insignificance of his position (but unlike the Man from Underground, he is not fully aware of all the ironic pettiness and folly in his character, nor does he derive a perverse pleasure from what knowledge he has). Yet there is another interesting comparison to be made. This is with Max Stirner's neglected tour de force, *The Ego and his Own.* Stirner urged complete and inflexible self-possession, total independence from any external fetters whatever, be those fetters material or philosophical, defined in his concept of "ownness":-

> Freedom lives only in the realm of dreams! Ownness, on the contrary, is my whole being and existence, it is I myself. I am free from what I am *rid* of, owner of what I have in my *power* or what I *control*[26]

Joseph's search for a definition of self, for a means of dealing with freedom, might be said to take place on the path towards 'ownness' - but he clearly fails to be an 'owner', an 'egoist'. Stirner also foresaw a 'union' of like 'egoists', a notion very similar to Joseph's 'colony of the spirit'. Stirner's philosophy, however, is no doubt an "ideal construction" - little wonder that Joseph fails to live up to it! Nevertheless, I do not wish to make too much of this link, and mention it only as an aside, as I can find no reference to Stirner in any of Bellow's utterances (the latter, I think, would find Stirner strident and cranky - but no doubt interesting) nor do I wish to be accused of doing exactly that which I criticised in my opening remarks, namely foisting a hobby horse onto Bellow's fiction! In any case, it seems to me that the most important, relevant and profound influence is that of Joseph on Bellow's

subsequent central characters. Fifty years on, his precept that "Alternatives, and particularly desirable alternatives, grow only on imaginary trees"[84] still holds true.

References

The Epigraphs are respectively:

Dostoyevsky, Fyodor: *Notes From Underground*, Penguin Classics, Penguin Books, London, England, 1972, p122.

Stirner, Max: *The Ego and His Own*, Western World Press, Sun City, California, 1989, p157.

1 Glenday, Michael: *Saul Bellow and the Decline of Humanism*, McMillan Press, Basingstoke, Hampshire, 1990, p.16.

2 Rodriguez, Eusebio: *Quest for the Human*, Bucknell University Press Lewisburg, 1981, p.15.

3 Glenday: *S.B.D.H.*, pp.24-25.

4 Clayton, John J: *In Defense of Man*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1968, p.24..

5 ibid p.25.

6 ibid p.25.

7 ibid p.24.

8 Dutton, Robert R: *Saul Bellow*, Twayne Publishers, Boston, 1971, p.23.

9 ibid p.23.

10 ibid p.22.

11 Rodriguez: *Quest for the Human*, p.31.

12 Dutton, p.31.

13 Wilson, Jonathan: *On Bellow's Planet*, Associated University Press, Cranbury, NJ, 1985, p.42.

14 ibid p.22.

15 ibid p.16

16 Opdahl, Keith M: *The Novels of Saul Bellow*, Pennsylvania State University, 1967, p.42.

17 Bellow, Saul: *Dangling man*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, 1988, p.26 All subsequent page references are from this edition and are cited in the main body of the text.

18 Dutton: *Saul Bellow*, p.21

19 Clayton: *In Defence of Man*, p.119

20 Neitzsche, Frederich: *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Penguin Classics, Harmondsworth, England, 1969, p.72

[21] Waterman, Andrew: 'Saul Bellow's Ineffectual Angels', *On the Novel,* ed, B.K. Benedikz, London, 1971, pp218-39, (p.224).

[22] Saul Bellow: 'A World Too Much With Us'. *Critical Inquiry,* 2.1 (1975) p.9.

[23] Saul Bellow: 'A Writer from Chicago', *The Tanner Lectures on Human values*, ed. Sterling M. McMurrin, Vol. 3, Salt Lake City UT; Cambridge University Press, 1982, pp175-219, (p218).

[24] See, for instance, Opdahl and Clayton..

[25] Gray, Rockwell, *et al*, 'Interview with Saul Bellow',*Triquarterly 60*, (1984), p.12-34, (p17).

[26] Stirner, Max: *The Ego and His Own,* p.157

## Chapter Two

### *The Victim* - Physician, heal thyself!

"...Every man is responsible for everyone,
only people don't know it. If they knew -
it would be paradise at once!"

Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*

A 'victim' is described in the dictionary as follows:

...person or thing injured or destroyed in pursuit of an object, in gratification of a passion, etc., or as a result of event or circumstance.[1]

While this description may be applied to one or two figures in Saul Bellow's second novel, it cannot in all honesty be appropriate with regard to the central character, Asa Leventhal; for if Leventhal is a victim- and he is - his status is due not so much to an overweening desire or *hubris,* nor even to being a helpless pawn in a game of chance, but more to the weaknesses and prejudices inherent in his own personality. The flaws in the make-up of this most saturnine, least endearing of all Bellow's key protagonists are glaringly exposed. In the crushing, jostling, claustrophobic world of the novel, a world of "barbaric fellahin",[2] Leventhal seems to be a symptom of the prevailing chaotic savagery rather than its prey, and an incongruous vehicle for a humanist outlook.

Foremost among the features in Leventhal's character which Bellow shows us to be self-destructive is the persecution complex the former manifests with regard to his race. He displays a hyper-sensitivity in this respect which borders on the psychotic. As Michael Glenday correctly points out, "Leventhal is the worst kind of Jew who uses his identity in an irresponsible, churlish and damaging way"[3]. True, there are various instances in the novel where Leventhal appears justified in taking offence, particularly at the sloppy and gratuitous anti-Semitism of his employer, Mr.

Beard, or more importantly, at the slimy insinuations and accusations of Allbee, Leventhal's mendacious and hypocritical incubus (Allbee, significantly, mirrors Leventhal's obsessive touchiness with his own dominant conviction that, "It's really as if the children of Caliban were running everything"[129]). Even on these occasions, however, Leventhal seems all too eager to seize upon the slightest hint of a slur. More disturbing are the cases where Leventhal impugns the character of others by attributing to them a racial prejudice which is unsubstantiated by any shred of evidence. He is certain, for instance, that the mother of his sister-in-law interprets the death of young Mickey as divine retribution for her daughter's having married out of the faith - and particularly having done so with a Jew. He conceives a furious loathing of the old woman (having already been "tempted to jostle her"[53]) which culminates in his virtually ordering his brother to chuck her out into the street. Similarly, he unfairly accuses Williston of siding with Allbee because Leventhal is a Jew, an accusation made all the more ridiculous since Williston had previously helped Leventhal to secure a job. His paranoia is revealed most nakedly in the attitude he adopts towards Disraeli, during the exchanges with his Jewish acquaintances, prompting one of these latter to declare that he had "never seen such an exhibition of ghetto psychology"[223]. And Leventhal himself is not above indulging in a spot of racial stereotyping in the other direction, as when he castigates Williston for a lack of "Anglo-Saxon fairness...fair play"[80]. But typically, Bellow refuses to leave the reader with an unambiguous view, by adding a beautifully mischievous rider (which, as far as I am aware, has gone unnoticed). Harkavy, Leventhal's Jewish friend, fulminates over what he sees as Leventhal's capitulation to Allbee's conspiracy theory that "it's all a Jewish setup...Jews have influence with other Jews"[235-236]. Later on[256] we are told that Leventhal has managed to get a new job - through Harkavy.

Leventhal's persecution mania is scarcely less powerful on an individual level. He displays a masochistic desire to heap blame and guilt upon himself. This tendency is first evidenced when he persuades himself that his ill-tempered confrontation with Rudiger has led to his (Leventhal's) name being placed on an employment blacklist. Leventhal typically slides from an initial pride at having asserted his worth as an individual into a morass of self-reproach (The existence of a blacklist is, incidentally, a figment of Leventhal's imagination). Further, he comes to believe that his sister-in-law holds him responsible for Mickey's death because he had had the temerity to send for a specialist to look at the boy (although he does manage to defend himself by imputing "a suggestion of distraction or even of madness not very securely held in check"[5] to Elena). Most important in the context of the novel, though, is Leventhal's gradual subservience to the view that he is in some way responsible for Allbee's dismissal from his job, and therefore, his subsequent deterioration. The *reader* is never quite sure how far Leventhal is accountable - little wonder, then, that Leventhal, with his morbidly active guilt complex, ultimately becomes the marionette of Allbee, acquiescing in the latter's every imposition (until the incident with the prostitute), and, one suspects, half revelling in the neurasthenic effect that Allbee has upon him. Allbee, it should be noted, here reveals his own shameless hypocrisy. For, under the terms of his brutal philosophy of chaos, a philosophy that states that "one day we're like full bundles and the next we're wrapping paper blowing around the streets"[67], he has no right to expect anyone else to feel responsible for his [Allbee's] downfall, since "we do get it in the neck for nothing and suffer for nothing"[130]. Leventhal, astonishingly, recognises this incongruity - "there was a wrong, a general wrong. Allbee, on the other hand, came along and said 'You!' and that was what was so meaningless"[71] - and yet does nothing about it. Much of the humanist case with regard to *The Victim* rests on

the assertion that Leventhal comes to embrace a concept of responsibility for his fellow man - as we shall see, this is doubtful.

Adding to the catalogue of idiosyncrasies which Leventhal displays is, first, his barely suppressed terror at the possibility of inheriting his mother's 'madness'. Indeed, "illness, madness and death"[141] seem to be his constant companions throughout the novel. Allied to this is an overburdening fear of falling back into the abyss of failure and becoming one of "the lost, the outcast, the overcome, the effaced, the ruined"[16]. Second, his inclination towards violence (already commented upon with regard to Elena's mother) is repeatedly evinced in his encounters with Allbee, actually resulting in physical grappling on two occasions (set against the background of the stultifying heat and the thronging masses, this disposition actually seems quite understandable). And third, a factor which must not be overlooked, his sexual prurience (Leventhal in this respect resembles not only Joseph in *Dangling Man,* but also Josef K in *The Trial*). Leventhal is somewhat preoccupied with the desires of the flesh. He fantasises for one moment that Allbee's whore is in fact the caretaker's wife, in whom he seems to have quite an interest. At Mickey's funeral, virtually the first thing which arrests Leventhal's attention is Elena's figure. And when Allbee makes a lewd comment in an elevator full of schoolgirls, the clear implication is that he is lagging away behind Leventhal's thoughts. Bearing these features in mind, it strikes the reader as somewhat preposterous that Harkavy should upbraid Leventhal thus: "It's almost a sin to be so innocent. Get beside yourself, boy, will you?"[78]. Clearly Harkavy allies bad judgment to his earlier 'righteous indignation'.

The foregoing examinations of Leventhal's character do not in themselves totally preclude a humanist interpretation. But what can immediately be said is that these

foibles certainly do not reveal a "rational" mind (in accordance with the terms of our earlier definition). And if Asa Leventhal is to be awarded the humanist badge of honour, such an award is clearly dependent on progress being made in the development of his personality, on whether he really is "born again, into a truer vision of reality"[4]. I shall return to this key point later. In the meantime, it should be asked whether humanism, as critics of this persuasion would understand it, is at all possible in the world that is presented to the reader of *The Victim*. Bellow, in an essay, has made reference to Kipling's 'decent self':-

> This is no longer the sovereign self of the Romantics, but the decent self of Kipling whose great satisfaction it is to recognise the existence of a great number of others. These numerous others reduce personal significance, and both realism and dignity require us to accept this reduction.[5]

Yet in the often harsh, randomly violent, ferociously compressed environment of this novel, wherein millions of congested selves urgently crowd against one another, there is little satisfaction to be derived from such a recognition of others - quite the opposite -there are so many souls that it becomes a horror to each individual confronted by this knowledge. Consequently, each attempts to turn inwards , and in Leventhal's case his own lack of self-knowledge causes a 'dangling' state. This phenomenon, I think, accounts for the nature of human relationships in *The Victim* - paltry, threadbare and superficial. Neither Elena nor Max, for instance, know the name of Leventhal's wife. Leventhal himself has not seen his brother for years. Schlossberg, after declaiming for the benefit of Leventhal amongst others (though particularly, one suspects, for his own benefit) fails to remember who the latter is on their second meeting. And there is a distinctly chilly air to the relations between Leventhal and his supposed 'best friend', Harkavy. It seems clear that in this world, "common human needs" are, at best, deep-hidden. This is why so much emphasis is placed, particularly by humanist critics, on the microcosmical relationship of

Leventhal to Allbee, on whether the former can move "toward a submergence of individuality in a transpersonal anonymous self"[6].

Before I address the issues raised in the foregoing passages, I would like to devote particular attention to Schlossberg's 'philosophy of the human'. One critic has called it "perhaps the central speech of Bellow's fiction"[7]. There has been an overwhelming tendency, if not indeed unanimous agreement, to view Schlossberg as the authoritative Bellow mouthpiece. Witness these representative excerpts from the old man's address:-

I'll tell you. It's bad to be less than human and it's bad to be more than human. What's more than human? [...] We only know what it is to die because some people die and, if we make ourselves different from them, maybe we don't have to? Less than human is the other side of it [...] This girl Livia in 'The Tigress' [...] She commits a murder. What are her feelings? No love, no hate, no fear, no lungs, no heart [...] Nothing. You see right away she has no idea what is human because her husband's death doesn't mean to her a thing.[119]

and:-

More than human, can you have any use for life? Less than human, you don't either [...] Have dignity, you understand me? Choose dignity. Nobody knows enough to turn it down.[119-120]

Moreover:-

There's a limit to me. But I have to be myself in full. Which is somebody who dies, isn't it? [...] I was born once and I will die once. You want to be two people? More than human? Maybe it's because you don't know how to be one.[229]

All well and good. But these passages must not be swallowed whole; for as is his wont, Bellow wields a double-edged sword, half serious and half ironic. We are told, for instance, that Schlossberg still financially supports his thirty five year-old

son. How much 'dignity' is involved in this arrangement for either party is unclear. Can Schlossberg's son 'be himself in full'? Moreover, Shifcart, the theatrical agent, tosses his card to Schlossberg at the end of the latter's oration in almost sardonic fashion (Harkavy echoes the sense of theatricality with his cry of "Bravo!"). Schlossberg might be viewed as a dignified representative of the 'exactly human' - or he might just as well be viewed as a jaded Vaudevillian continually hawking his own pompous and hammy self-importance (on the two occasions that the reader encounters Schlossberg, he is extolling precisely the same theme). As for his philosophy itself, Keith Opdahl and John Clayton respectively speak of "the serenity that Schlossberg finds in acceptance of our limited humanity",[8] and of "this beauty and dignity [which] can be realised only by admitting that you are merely human."[9] I find it difficult to draw the same conclusions. The problem is that Schlossberg's philosophy is one of submission, accommodation and, ultimately, *stagnation.* At first sight it may appear that the old man's attack corresponds with the 'middle ground' of the typical Bellow hero - but this is not so. This area for the Bellow hero is violently changeable and deeply ambiguous - an area of perennial uncertainty. For Schlossberg, on the other hand, this is an area of stationary certitude - the realm of the 'exactly human'. And, indeed, his stance smacks of smugness and bombastic self-congratulation: his 'moderation' equates with a sleepy mediocrity. In essence, Schlossberg is in possession of the "virtue that makes small".[10] That Schlossberg's philosophy is a recipe for decay there can be little doubt, especially if we examine a comment of Fernando Molina, cited by Clayton in support of a positive view of Schlossberg's theory:-

> Only the awareness of one's finitude extricates the person from the endless whirl of pleasing himself, taking things lightly and shirking tasks that fill much of everyday living.

Clayton himself goes on to say that "Confrontation of death results in living as an T, a particular subject, instead of living as a 'they'; and it results in acknowledging yourself as a member of humanity".[11] Yet surely it would be correct to point out that the opposite could be the case - it is the awareness of death that *causes* one to become sensualist, feckless and indolent. One has only to think of the Decadents, best represented in literary form by Des Esseintes in Huysmans' *Against Nature* - it is their sense of the futility of existence and their boredom with the 'exactly human' which precipitates their degeneration. There is a similar lack of room for any doubt that Bellow is unaware of the limitations of Schlossberg's view - for, as is usual with the author, the character of Schlossberg represents *a* view - not *the* view. One need only look back to Bellow's comment on *The Brothers Karamazov,* cited in this introduction, with regard to 'opposites ranging themselves against each other'. For Ivan in this case read Allbee, for Father Zossima read Schlossberg. Compared with the uncompromising denunciations of Allbee, Schlossberg's speech can seem vague and hokey. Of course, as has been mentioned, Allbee's philosophy is full of holes as well, but the point is that Schlossberg's utterances should not be regarded as a Bellovian tablet of stone. Incidentally, might we not be justified in pointing out the possibility that , far from being "not even human"[245], the drained and devitalised Allbee whom we encounter at the novel's conclusion, the Allbee who has now accepted his limitations - is he not now, in Schlossberg's terms - 'exactly human'?

To return, then, to the crucial question of whether Leventhal's involvement with Allbee has proved to be a catalyst which allows the former access to a reconstituted perspective both on himself and on the rest of humanity. As was mentioned earlier, the reader has to remain sceptical in this regard. For Leventhal to be seen to have changed, he must perforce display not only new characteristics in his own make-up, but also must provide an effective contrast with the ever-deteriorating Allbee

(although Allbee avers that he is "enjoying life"[264] at the novel's close, there can be no doubt that he is an enervated and withered wreck - he manifests "the decay of something that had gone into his appearance of well-being, something intimate"[262]). And yet Leventhal and Allbee seem all too similar at the culmination of events. Indeed, it is the affinities which exist between the two which are stressed throughout *The Victim.* There are the "duplicate looks"[143] shared by the two men. There is the guilt that plays havoc with the emotions of both - Allbee with regard to his dead wife, Leventhal with regard to almost everything! There are the conspiracy theories to which both are 'victim': Allbee detects the existence of a Jewish cabal, Leventhal convinces himself that there is a guild of newspapermen. And there is the bizarre linkage between the two in Allbee's suicide (or murder) attempt. In the final meeting of the duo, Leventhal is conscious of a notion that life is "a shuffle, all, all accidental and haphazard"[256] whilst Allbee feebly confesses that "The world wasn't made exactly for me"[264]. But there is, nevertheless, a decisive aspect in which they differ. For while Allbee resigns himself to the role of 'passenger' in life, tamely accepting his part as an inconsequential cog subject to the caprices of Fate (in many ways mirroring the situation of Myron Adler in *Dangling Man* who had "learned [...] to prize convenience [...] to be accommodating", with all the "terrible ramifications" that this lesson implies[12]), Leventhal at least knows enough to say that ultimately his notion of submission to a random chaos "was wrong"[257]. Yet, on the other side of the coin, what Leventhal had *seemed* to learn during the course of the novel appears, by its denouement, to have passed him by - or, more accurately, he has apparently failed fully to apprehend the meaning of that tentative knowledge which events had given him, and which might have led him to change. Leventhal's clumsy steps towards a kind of fraternity with Max and Phil (and on a more general level with Fay, Villani, Mr.Nunez - and Allbee); his grudging awarenes of the deficiencies of his own character; his stumbling

consciousness of his (and others') responsibility to everyone else; his vision of piercing lucidity wherein he sees that "everything, everything without exception, took place as if within a single soul or person"[151]; these revelations seem transient and ephemeral, belonging to an unattainable realm of perfection. Leventhal admits as much: "...tomorrow this would be untenable. I won't be able to hold onto it [...] Something would prevent it"[151]. In essence Leventhal is *changeable* - but not changed. His final, plaintive, unanswered question to Allbee -"Wait a minute, what's your idea of who runs things?"[264]- epitomises the confusion and indetermination at the core of his being. For the truth is that a man like Leventhal finds his natural home in a life of contradiction and irresolution. Whereas the likes of Allbee and Schlossberg achieve a large measure of certainty ( but at what cost?), it is no exaggeration to say that Leventhal is sustained by his inconclusive responses and uncertain comprehension. Even the 'ultimate refuge' for this soul in turmoil - "God will help me out"[205] - seems to offer no shelter in the light of Leventhal's last floundering enquiry - though it does offer a hint to the direction that many of the subsequent Bellow heroes will attempt to take.

Squeezed between the polarised notions of, on the one hand, the almost mystical knowledge required to gain access to the harmonious vision of the 'decent self' and, on the other, the fear of being swamped in a hyper-Malthusian nightmare, Leventhal's "indifferent intelligence"[16] seems so because of his equivocal reactions both to the world and his self. His life will continue in the unstable middle-ground, the Bellovian realm which admits of both wonderment and dread.

Michael Glenday makes an ingenious, but contrived bid at a reversal of roles in the reading of the novel. In this interpretation, it is Leventhal "who succumbs to that reality (the dominant reality of American life), who capitulates to its management"

and ends in a state of "slavery and darkness [...] a pathetic rather than a detestable figure".[13] There is, in fact, no better way of describing Allbee - Leventhal dangles, Allbee capitulates. Moreover, Allbee, in Glenday's opinion, has access to a "more profound and authoritative vision [...] which makes his point of view capable of carrying the weight of Bellow's own" and "is given status as one of penetrating and true vision".[14] This is surely not the case for, as was mentioned earlier, there is no such thing as *the* unimpeachable Bellow view in any of the novels - Allbee represents *a* view, embodies one sort of vision (incidentally, without wishing to labour the point, I would aver that my earlier comments about the predisposition of the critic are reinforced by Glenday's view and, indeed, by the previously quoted view of Clayton). Most astonishing, though, is the attempt to set Allbee up as a purveyor of a "bold triumphalist declaration of human potential and freedom"[15]. This is done on the basis of Allbee's claim that he can repent and "become a new man"[204]. Yet clearly he does nothing of the sort - the only difference in his philosophy at the novel's close is that it is an insipid and exhausted variation on the same theme of bitter and elemental nihilism. Additionally, Allbee's assertion that "I know I have a fallen nature. I never pretended to be anything I wasn't"[244], debars him from any serious consideration, for this is exactly what he has done, in his earlier protestations that he was an aristocrat and a man of honour[125-126]. Should any doubts about Allbee persist, they will be dispelled by his entanglement with the prostitute, following as it does his tearful reminiscences about his beloved wife. Essentially Allbee remains an actor and a hypocrite and were it not for his mordant sense of humour and bouts of pitiable self-indulgence, we might be tempted to say that he proves the exception to the rule about Bellow's 'worst men' possessing redeeming qualities.

What emerges most forcefully from *The Victim* is the difficulty of establishing sincere, meaningful and deep relations between human beings in a stifling, oppressive and often forbidding world. Bellow, it seems, felt this too:

I think that when I wrote these early books (*Dangling Man* and *The Victim*) I was timid [...] In short, I was afraid to let myself go.[16]

We know, furthermore, that no less than one hundred thousand words of what appears to have been a similarly overcast novel were discarded after publication of *The Victim*.[17] A clean break with the past looked to have been made. From the reticent and sullen Leventhal, Bellow moved on to the gregarious and interactive Augie. No one, it seemed, could be more dissimilar to Joseph and Asa - and yet...

References

Note .'Asa' means 'healer' in Hebrew.

Epigraph. Dostoyevsky Fyodor: *The Brothers Karamazov,* Penguin Classics, Penguin Books London, England, 1982, p350.

1 *The Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, OUP, 1985.

2 Bellow, Saul: *The Victim,* Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England1988, p1. All subsequent page references are from this edition and cited in the main body of the text.

3 Glenday, Michael: *Saul Bellow and the Decline of Humanism*, p30.

4 Tanner, Tony: *Saul Bellow,* Oliver and Boyd Ltd., Edinburgh and London, 1965, p33.

5 Bellow, Saul: 'Some Notes on Recent American Fiction', *Encounter*, November, 1963, pp22-29, (p27).

6 Clayton, John Jay: *In Defence of Man*, p164.

7 ibid, p44.

8 Opdahl, Keith: *The Novels of Saul Bellow*, p66.

9 Clayton: *I.D.M.*, p139.

10 Cf *Thus Spake Zarathustra*

11 Clayton: *I.D.M.*, p153.

12 *Dangling Man*, p38.

13 Glenday: *S.B.D.H.* pp34 and 53.

14 ibid, pp36 and 38.

15 ibid, p51.

16 Lloyd Harper, Gordon: "Saul Bellow". Interview reprinted in Rovit, Earl: *Saul Bellow: A collection of critical essays*, Eaglewood Cliffs, N.J., 1975, pp5-19, (pp8-9)

17 Kalb, Bernard: "Biographical Sketch", *Saturday Review of Literature* 36, p13, cited in Rodrigues: *Quest for Humans,* p73.

## Chapter Three

### *The Adventures of Augie March* - A Nothing Self.

"And what was the most impractical of choices in sombre, heavy, growling, low-brow Chicago? Why it was to be the representative of beauty, the interpreter of the human heart, the hero of ingenuity, playfulness, personal freedom, generosity and love."

Saul Bellow.

"Love - the folly of thinking much of another before one knows anything of oneself."

Ambrose Bierce,
*The Enlarged Devil's Dictionary.*

Some things remain altogether mystifying. Like, for instance, Bellow's repeatedly expressed retrospective misgivings about "the book that made his literary reputation".[1] On a personal note he felt that he had compromised himself:-

I had just increased my freedom, and like any emancipated plebeian I abused it at once.[2]

I really knew much more about darkness than I let on...I had no excuse for being such an ingenu. I felt like doing the ingenu that's all.[3]

And, in addition to such self-censure, Bellow went on to criticise his main character:-

There is a kind of light-hearted equality about the book which is - well, inaccurate. It's not really the way it was; it's just the way Augie wanted it to be.[4]

Such a blue-eyed ingenu and leads such a charmed life. Too much the Sherwood Anderson sort of thing: 'Gee whiz. what wonderful people, what a mysterious world!' All wrong![5]

What is baffling about such statements is that there seems to be little or no justification for making them. Taken at face value, the author's comments would seem to preclude the kind of interpretation being pursued in this study, namely that

of the co-existence of sanctioning and debunking in narrative technique which results in the perennial 'dangling' condition of the central characters. For clearly, if Bellow believes that his representation has erred too greatly on the side of an innocent and transparent optimism, an analysis of this sort is doomed to founder. Augie himself tells us early on in the novel that he is "too larky and boisterous"[6] for the cares of the world, and is berated by the hawkish Grandma Lausch for assuming that he can "get by with laughing and eating peach pie"[29]. Yet it soon becomes abundantly clear that alongside Augie's supposed unworldliness there trundles an extensive irony - and it is an irony which, for one of the few occasions in the entirety of Bellow's writing, often becomes so laborious and ungainly as to grate on the endurance of the reader. Moreover, this insight is not the preserve of "a few discerning critics"[7]. The contradictory nature of the eponymous hero is apparent to most (Indeed, a critique which takes account of Bellow's ostensible repudiation of the ingenuousness of the novel, then claims that "the book ought to be seen as Bellow's subtle modification of the picaresque mode so that it can express the inauthentic nature of reality in modern times"[8] would seem to be even more confused than the character of Augie!). Robert Penn Warren, for instance, in a contemporary review of the novel, notes that "There is a deep and undercutting irony in the wisdom and hope, and a sadness even in Augie's high-heartedness".[9] And John Clayton is "suspicious of Augie's ingenuousness and larkiness and ability to slip through".[10] Thus the peculiarity of Bellow's harsh comments. Perhaps he was indulging his fitful *penchant* to 'act the goat' with interviewers. More significantly it behoves the reader to draw a careful line between Bellow the artist and Bellow the interviewee. For while the author's ironic subtlety may well have been attenuated, his artistic integrity has not failed him. Bellow's novels are inevitably more complex and ambiguous than many of his personal pronouncements. Augie is just as much a 'dangler' as Joseph or Leventhal or,

indeed, any other Bellovian hero. Still, one should not pretend that Bellow's comments on *The Adventures of Augie March* can easily be explained away - they cannot. All one can do is show how misplaced they are.

Bellow is critical of his portrayal of Augie as an ingenu. Yet in the very first paragraph of the novel Augie states that he is "first to knock, first admitted; sometimes an innocent knock, sometimes a not so innocent"[3]. So while he can claim, apropos of the story of how a young Abe Lincoln battled through a howling gale for four miles to refund three cents to a customer, that "those four miles wouldn't have been a hindrance if the right feelings were kindled"[23], he can admit in the very same breath that, I could put my heart into a counterfeit too, just as easily"[23]. And how true this is - Augie's life is replete with 'counterfeit' activities. From his earliest days when, under the tutelage of Grandma Lausch, he lies about his circumstances to the people at the dispensary in order to obtain free glasses for his mother, through his varied career as a thief (wherein he steals "coal off the cars, clothes from the lines, rubber balls from the dime store and pennies off the newsstands"[12], is "party to a robbery"[112], steals books from libraries and stores to sell them on, and is "engaged in a swindle in Deever's neighbourhood department store"[43]), to his involvement with the smuggling of illegal immigrants across the border, Augie stores up a considerable encyclopaedia of criminal experience. Augie's assertion that "I lacked the true sense of being a criminal"[45] reveals two things about him. First, the reader is left to wonder exactly what *does* constitute this "true sense", since at the close of the novel Augie is again involved in shady dealings, this time operating on the black market in post-war Europe. Second, however, the reader can recognise an element of truth in what Augie says. For every illegitimate action that Augie performs is as a result of his being imposed upon by "one of those Machiavellis of small street and neighbourhood"[4] which populate his

existence and draw him into their schemes - whether it be Grandma Lausch, Stashu Kopecs, Joe Gorman, Manny Padilla or Jimmy Klein (paradoxically Augie does not actually commit any crime at the behest of swindler-in-chief William Einhorn). Augie even lazily dumps Sylvester's bills down the sewer to remove the bother of having to distribute them - because everybody else does it. And, of course, Augie's participation in the hidden economy is conducted at the request of Mintouchian, the latest in the long line of dominant influences over Augie. So perhaps Augie may be justified in his claim that the "true sense" of criminality is absent in his make-up; his actions instead being the result of his malleability in the hands of such manipulative personalities. It is just this malleability, however, which illuminates the fundamental contradictions of Augie's world.

Tony Tanner observes that "for all the bravado and independence of his tone, Augie in fact is a very passive character, amenable to suggestions and offers, pliant, with apparently little momentum of his own."[11] Augie himself owns up:-

> All the influences were lined up waiting for me. I was born and there they were to form me, which is why I tell you more of them than of myself.[43]

and:-

> People have been adoptive toward me, as if I were really an orphan.[103]

and again:-

> But first of all there was something adoptional about me [...] something about me suggested adoption. And then there were some people who were especially adoption-minded.[151]

Nevertheless, when Einhorn tells Augie that the latter has "opposition" in him, Augie feels entitled to boast:-

This was the first time that anyone had told me anything like the truth about myself. I felt it powerfully. That, as he said, I did have opposition in me, and great desire to offer resistance and to say "No!" which was as clear as could be, as definite a feeling as a pang of hunger.[117]

Moreover:-

No, I didn't want to be what he called determined. I never had accepted determination and wouldn't become what other people wanted to make of me.[117]

And although Augie notes that "Einhorn had seen this in me. Because he too wanted to exert influence"[118], Marcus Klein's comment that Augie "[...]eludes. He is not to be caught by the shaping influences. He won't be determined"[12] has a certain validity. But what is the true nature of this conformity/opposition dialectic? That the vagaries of external stimuli have a disproportionate effect on Augie is indubitable. Yet his susceptibility to such outside forces seems to depend less on their potency than on his own paucity of character. The paradox is that while the forces of external experience should act as catalysts for Augie to attempt self-discovery, he instead uses them to slough off any notion of autonomy, loses himself in others and tries to dodge a concept of responsibility for his self and his actions. For if anything should go awry (and things invariably do), Augie can always blame the insane designs of the Machiavellis rather than confront his own situation. It might be thought that such a view is harsh on Augie, because of course he ultimately does always disengage himself from one tangled web after another - yet the very fact that he is continually re-engaging himself reinforces the extent to which he is dependent on this process for the pattern of his life. Thus it is that in addition to all those who had influence on his illegal escapades, he runs through Thea, with her plan for the conquest of nature, the grossly materialistic ethos of his brother Simon, the 'design for living' of the incongruously seedy millionaire Robey, and (admittedly against his will) the psychopathic programme of the crazed 'world-historical

individual Basteshaw. Yet in fairness to Augie, he belatedly reproaches himself with the realisation of what consequences follow from his fluctuating involvements - "I couldn't be hurt enough by the fate of other people"[453]. His actions damage others, as they are prisoners of their dominant idea, whereas Augie, with no fixed idea of self, can withdraw with only cuts and bruises. Typically for the Bellow hero, though, Augie does not seem to act upon this realisation, as his encounter with the old Piedmontese woman whom he tries to fob off shows:-

-People are coming up to me all the time. So why don't you please take this money and ...

-People! But I am not other people. You should realise that. I am - This is happening to *me*!...

I gave her another hundred lire.[518-19]

So Augie's submission to the multiform dominant influences is quite literally a self-defeating act. On the other side of the coin is Augie's "opposition". It is this quality which eventually allows Augie to break free of whatever moulding force holds sway over him at any given time. Moreover, Augie tells us that his opposition has a definite purpose to it, this being first evidenced when he rejects the idea of marriage with Friedl Coblin:-

Even at the time I couldn't imagine that I would marry into the Coblin family. [...] My mind was already dwelling on a good enough fate.[28]

It resurfaces when he renounces the influence of Mrs. Renling:-

However, I was in a state of removal from all her intentions for me. Why should I turn into one of these people who didn't know who they themselves were? (!!) And the unvarnished truth is that it wasn't a fate good enough for me.[151]

And it appears again in his dealings with Thea:-

I tried to tell her that I had looked all my life for the right thing to do, for a fate good enough for me...[318]

and with Simon:-

...Why, sure I'd like to have money too. I didn't say that I had to have a fate good enough, and that this came first.[423]

Wasn't it good enough? And to what should you go rather? I wasn't proud of myself, believe me, and my stubborness about a "higher" independent fate.[424]

A noble intention - one shared by Joseph in *Dangling Man*, who desires a "separate destiny" - but an intention which, in Augie's as in Joseph's case, has little prospect of being realised. And because Augie's "higher, independent fate" achieves no actuality, it is in danger of being viewed in the same light as Joseph's "ideal construction" - as an unattainable dream. This being the case, the suspicion grows that Augie's "opposition" could be "merely an evasive lack of commitment",[13] or simply a perverse bloody-mindedness with no clear goal of its own. The closest Augie comes to any semblance of a "fate good enough" is in his idea of founding the quasi-utopian community wherein he and his family can impart wisdom and goodness to deprived children. But as Augie himself later confesses, "my foster home and academy dream was [...] one of those featherhead millenarian notions or summer butterflies"[516]. Augie's fate thus comes to centre on the mystical intuition of the "axial lines of life" outlined in a passage which, like Schlossberg's speech in *The Victim*, is often regarded by critics as "official" Bellow:-

'I have a feeling,' I said, 'about the axial lines of life, with respect to which you must be straight or else your existence is merely clownery, hiding tragedy [...] When

striving stops, there they are as a gift [...] Truth, love, peace, bounty, usefulness, harmony! And all noise and grates, distortion, chatter, distraction, effort, superfluity passed off like something unreal [...]At any time life can come together again and man be regenerated [...] the man himself, finite and taped as he is, can still come to where the axial lines are. He will be brought into focus. He will live with true joy [...] And this is not imaginary stuff, Clem, because I bring my entire life to the test'.[454-55]

Bellow, however, makes it quite clear that for Augie the axial lines will remain beyond his apprehension.

And since I never have had any place of rest, it should follow that I have trouble being still, and furthermore my hope is based on getting to be still so that the axial lines can be found. When striving stops, the truth comes as a gift - bounty, harmony, love, and so forth. Maybe I can't take these very things I want.[514]

Incidentally, when juxtaposed with the pronouncements of the likes of Robey and Basteshaw, there is a hint in Augie's speech of the rather pitiful Utopianism of the two monomaniacs. But the most important point is that Augie cannot grasp the desired "higher independent fate" *nor* can he achieve any lasting understanding through the medium of others. A yearned-for state of grace, a passive consciousness, clashes with an ineluctable, yet directionless capacity for physical engagement. The result - a 'nothing' self. Negative connotations are not necessarily implied by this state of affairs - it simply means that Augie's being is formless, protean and forever 'dangling'. Augie's original assertion that "a man's character is his fate"[3] proves correct in the sense that his amorphous character means that he can never come to a definite "higher independent fate". By the end of the novel, Augie realises the mutually dependent nature of his being and his destiny - "Well, then it is obvious that this fate, or what he settles for, is also his character"[514]. One might be tempted to conclude that Augie has achieved a fair degree of self-knowledge with this realisation, the awareness that the lack of a "good enough fate" points up the nebulousness of his essence. Yet he very rapidly undercuts any lasting

comprehension with the disingenuous declaration that he has embraced a concept of "amor fati"[527]. For such a notion is totally out of character for Augie, and the reader cannot help but feel that this character will compel Augie to break from his current situation (that of his marriage to Stella), and re-engage in further schemes down the road, beyond the confines of the novel. But, as was pointed out earlier, Augie's 'nothing' self is not necessarily a detrimental or life-denying quality. For Augie can see the horror of a "mismanaged effort to live"[533], a botching of one's fate, in the gradual decay of such as Simon and Jimmy, who are in thrall to their destinies. Augie, with his intrinsically shapeless character, will not fall victim to such slavery.

And so to Augie's travails in love. Bierce's caustic definition used as an epigraph for this chapter is particularly appropriate in the light of the above discussion of the nature of Augie's self. And it is consistent with his character that the portrayal of love should be subjected to a thoroughly rough passage through the medium of his adventures. Indeed, it is in this area that Bellow's irony is of that peculiarly unsubtle hue which ultimately tends to annoy the reader rather than enrich the novel. For there can be little doubt that love is intended to be bracketed under the same unfulfillable heading as a "higher independent fate" and the "axial lines". From his earlier rejection of Grandma Lausch's sour dogma - "The more you love people the more they'll mix you up. A child loves, a person respects. Respect is better than love."[9] - Augie spends his time seeking "the right grade of love"[302]. The fact that he consistently fails is mostly his own fault. One cannot help but derive the impression that Augie's 'love' is ephemeral, shallow and teetering on the brink of mendacity. True, Augie, as is his wont, is subject to the schemes of the Machiavellis, particularly Thea and Stella, for whom love seems to be a secondary consideration. But Augie's responses hardly ennoble him, seeming more like those

of the silly child to whom Grandma Lausch alludes. One should not mistake such responses as mere ingenuousness on Augie's part, however - for there is at least as much self-deception involved. And, of course, it is easy for Augie to accommodate such deceit thanks to the formlessness of his being.

One almost loses count of the number of occasions where Augie protests that he is in 'love'. As a youth he is"sick with love" for Hilda Novinson, claiming that:

> Those first times I was in the state of courtliness, craving pure feeling, and I was well stocked, probably by inheritance, in all the materials of love.[47]

He then falls in love with Esther Fenchel, "down to the poetic threat of death"[141]. When Esther's sister Thea informs him that it is *she* who loves him, Augie at first resists, though still allowing himself the luxury of meditating on what could be the polymorphous nature of love:-

> So for the same desires to meet was a freak occurrence. And to feel them so specific, settled on one person, maybe was an unallowable presumption, too pure, too special, and a misunderstanding of the real condition of things.[146]

Augie later puts this theory into practice, swapping partners with Padilla, "so no exclusive feelings would develop"[191]. In the midst of his affair with the soon to be married Sophie, Thea returns to proclaim her love for Augie. He has no difficulty in casting the former aside and instantaneously submitting to "a powerful feeling of love"[311] for Thea. He has initial doubts about this:-

> And then I had a lot of other notions, such as whether I was in danger of falling in love to oblige. Why? Because love was so rare that if one had it the other should capitulate to it? If, for the time, he had nothing more important on?[302]

but these are quickly dismissed. Thea, though, for all her faults, pinpoints the truth about Augie's love:-

'You want people to pour love on you and soak it up and swallow it. You can't get enough. And when another woman runs after you, you'll go with her. You're so happy when somebody begs you to oblige. You can't stand up under flattery!'[317]

Augie is nonplussed by this, claiming that "this jealousy made no sense"[317]. But of course, with a record like that of Augie, it makes perfect sense! And Thea is proved right when Augie eventually becomes embroiled with Stella (though Thea herself is scarcely less culpable due to her involvement with Talavera). Augie makes a feeble attempt to excuse his infidelity:-

I suppose if you pass the night with a woman in a deserted mountain place there's only one appropriate thing, according to the secret urging of the world. Or not so secret [...] I thought that in the crisis that seems to have to occur when a man and a woman are thrown together nothing, nothing easy can happen until first one difficulty is cleared and it is shown how the man is a man and the woman is a woman ...[390]

but he at least has the grace to admit that he "was terribly hot for this woman"[390]. Nevertheless, his inconstancy with regard to Thea does seem to provoke shattering revelations:-

If I didn't have money or profession or duties, wasn't it so that I could be free, and a sincere follower of love? Me, love's servant? I wasn't at all![401]

My real fault was that I couldn't stay with my purest feelings.[402]

and:-

I wanted simplicity and denied complexity, and in this I was guileful and suppressed many patents in my secret heart, and was as devising as anybody else.[402]

While as for me, whoever would give me cover from this mighty free-running terror and wild cold of chaos I went to, and therefore to temporary embraces. It wasn't very courageous.[403]

But Augie, in keeping with his character, does not take these lessons to heart. On his next meeting with Stella he is "humbled in the dust of love, the god Eros holding me down with his foot and forcing all kinds of impossible stuff on me"[470]. Furthermore, Augie can aver that "... I loved her. It was true. I felt I had come to the end of my trouble and hankering, and it was conclusive"[474]. Yet we see later (in a section of the novel wherein the irony is particularly blunt) that it is anything but conclusive. Mintouchian's view that "love is adultery [...] and expresses change"[483], which appears to stem more from his own bitterness over the lack of complete trust between him and his wife rather than from any philosophical analysis, is reflected right down to the last detail in Stella's confession about Cumberland, her apparent 'ex'-lover, even to the point of Stella's conviction (just as Mintouchian had outlined) that she had suffered more in guarding the secret than Augie has suffered in hearing it. The reader may just have formed the impression by now that all is not quite as it should be in the latest March attachment. Indeed, the very transitoriness of all of the "affections" leads one to believe that Augie and Stella might not make their golden wedding anniversary.

Further subsidiary examples of the ironic portrayal of love abound. Augie, for instance, on no occasion says that he is in love with Lucy Magnus. Yet he does not seem to offer much resistance (when does he ever?) to the materialistically-driven proposal of Simon that Lucy and Augie be married. Indeed, his indignation and outrage at the fact that the discovery of his imbroglio with Mimi has forced the cancellation of his proposal suggests that he was only too willing to enter into a soulless relationship for the purposes of monetary gain. The marriage of Simon

himself provides a chilling insight into a relationship which is at best composed of a strained affection and at worst simply a painful toleration based on social and material benefit, Simon being by far the more guilty party. In the light of the foregoing, it is all the more amazing that when Jimmy relates to Augie the circumstances of his miserable and loveless marriage of necessity, Augie should be shocked by this cynical view, noting that "this innocence of mine pleased him [Jimmy]"[267]. For Augie knows all about such marriages! And to round off the list, Augie professes to be disgusted at Robey's "five-marriage education" - yet *his* "love-education" follows a strikingly similar course. It is small wonder that whenever Augie tells his friends that he is in "love", they either show a doubting concern or manifest a gentle scorn. When Augie addresses the central conundrum of his existence - "An independent fate, and love too - what confusion!"[401] -the incompatibility of the two in Augie's world is evident. But then Augie does not really attain to either - so he ends by having neither. Yet it should not be thought that Bellow is attacking the inadequacy of love itself. It must always be emphasised that Augie's reduction is nine-tenths comic, and that the novel is anything but a cry of despair from the void. And although Augie, as one of Bellow's 'danglers', cannot achieve full consummation of his desire for love, nonetheless he refuses to rubbish this desire, wholeheartedly concurring with the view of Kayo Obermark that love is the great liberator:-

> What you are talking about is moha -[...] meaning opposition of the finite. It is the Bronx cheer of the conditioning forces. Love is the only answer to moha, being infinite.[450]

It is worth noting that, even though such unadulterated love is beyond Augie, it is his being itself, his nothing self, which contains the seeds of infinitude, and provides a kind of imperfect opposition to the finite.

In the light of the foregoing analysis, it is impossible to agree with the statements of Bellow in interview that there is a blindly affirmatory quality to the novel. Any 'humanist' interpretation must be similarly flawed, due not only to the inherently ironic portrayal of Augie, which calls into question his suitability for the part, due not only to Augie's failure finally to be affected enough by the fate of other human beings and his fragile interest in common human needs, but also because, like Leventhal, he does not discover anything permanent from his momentary insights and flighty understanding. He may be "touched with truth"[14], but it is the brushing contact of a passing stranger in the street. Augie may be "more larky formerly than now"[447] (although right at the close of the novel he says that "... I got to grinning again. That's the *animal ridens* in me, the laughing creature forever rising up"[536]), but his later statements indicate that his uncertainty of direction is perennial, and that his 'fate' constitutes a continuation of his anomalous spinning:-

> However, I didn't have the least idea of how to go about it [founding the paradisaical foster home]. And of course it was only one of those bubble-headed dreams of people who haven't yet realised what they're like nor what they're intended for.[515]

> Instead I'm in the bondage of strangeness for a time still. It's only temporary. We'll get out of it.[523]

The point is that, for Augie at least, escape from "the bondage of strangeness" can never be effected, for to do so would be to transport him into the bondage of stasis; either as a perpetual prisoner of someone else's design, or in an idealised state of sublimity which is contrary to the dynamic of his being. So, in a sense, it is better for Augie that he does not learn too well.

Attempts to prove that, on the other hand, Augie's adventures culminate in a despairing retreat into a barricaded gloom are equally ill-founded. For the simple fact is that Augie has no formed self in which to seek refuge. The conformity/opposition dialectic which actuates Augie, and produces his 'nothing' self, means that he straddles the middle-ground between self-fulfilment and fraternal absorption. The untenability of a negative conclusion is perhaps highlighted by the critical muddle into which it is easy to fall if one chooses to pursue the life-denying option. Michael Glenday asserts that Augie "chooses to embrace a stereotypical reality and by doing so becomes Bellow's saddest creation"[15]. Yet before the reader has had time to digest this statement, the same author avers that *"The Adventures of Augie March* is Bellow's capitulation to the forces of unreality"[16]. Such confusion is a direct result of a failure to appreciate fully the dangling formlessness of Augie's being - any attempt to pin Augie down initiates these contradictions. In any case, for all of Augie's undoubted short-comings, he never loses hope, as is evident in his attempts at a reconciliation with Thea:-

> Well, now that I knew of this I wanted another chance. I thought I must try to be brave again.[403]

> Most people are probably in the same condition I'm in. But there must be a way to learn to do better [...] How would the hope be there at all otherwise? How would I know what to want?[404]

and in his exposition of his philosophy to Tambow:-

> Why, it was a crying matter, no fooling, to anyone who might know which side was up, that here was I trying to refuse to lead a disappointed life. A hell of a cause of sympathetic tears but also, as Clem saw, of haw-haws, as great jokes often are.[432]

> It can never be right to offer to die; and if that's what the data of experience tell you, then you must get along without them.[436]

It is, as has been said, an intangible and out-of-reach hope - but its very existence shows that Augie, like every other Bellow hero, is not yet ready to throw his hands up in the air. Augie's visions of darkness and horror are ultimately as transient as his revelatory breakthroughs. And the ending of the novel, typically double-edged, juxtaposes the depressing ruins of Dunkirk amidst the cold inhospitable elements with the view of Augie, still formless, still dangling, his outlook still containing hope in the face of what the reader knows must remain inaccessible desires:-

> Look at me, going everywhere! Why, I am a sort of Columbus of those near at hand and believe that you can come to them in this immediate terra incognita that spreads out in every gaze. I may well be a flop at this line of endeavour. Columbus too thought he was a flop, probably when they sent him back in chains. Which didn't prove there was no America.[536]

Augie's laugh at the close is at himself - half joyous, half elegaic, expressing the essential changeability at the heart of his being. His adventures will continue long after the reader has taken his leave of him, with Augie engaging, breaking off, re-engaging, searching, failing and forever dangling in his attempts to solve life's great mysteries. And perhaps, on reflection, it is no bad thing that some things should remain mysterious.

References.

The epigraphs are, respectively,:-

Bellow, Saul: 'Starting Out in Chicago', *American Scholar*, 44.1, 1974/75, p71-77, (p71).

Bierce, Ambrose:- *The Enlarged Devil's Dictionary*, Penguin Classics, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, 1987, p215

1 Botsford, Keith: 'Saul Bellow: Made in America', *The Independent (Weekend)* 10 February, 1990.

2 Lloyd Harper, Gordon: 'Saul Bellow', Interview in *Rovit*, pp5-19 (p9).

3 Roudané, Matthew C: 'An Interview with Saul Bellow', *Contemporary Literature* 25, (1984), p265-280, (p279).

4 Gray, Rockwell, *et al:* 'Interview with Saul Bellow', *Triquarterly 60* (1984), pp12-34, p22.

5 Simmons, Maggie: 'Free to Feel: a Conversation with Saul Bellow', *Quest*, February/March, 1979, p31-35, (p31).

6 Bellow, Saul: *The Adventures of Augie March,* Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, England, 1966, p12. All subsequent page references are from this edition and are cited in the main body of the text.

7 "Bellow's yea-saying narrator struck a bold note; that it was a note originating in deep self-doubt and denial was obvious, only later, and only to a few discerning critics." (Glenday, p55) No doubt those discerning enough to agree with the views of this author.

8 Glenday: *S.B.D.H.*, p57.

9 Penn Warren, Robert: 'The Man with No Commitments', *New Republic*, 1953, pp22-23, Reprinted in Trachtenberg, Stanley, *Critical Essays on Saul Bellow*, G.K. Hall &Co., Boston, Mass., 1979, pp11-13, (p12).

10 Clayton; *I.D.M.* , p124.

11 Tanner; *Saul Bellow*, p47.

12 Klein, Marcus: 'A Dicipline of Nobility', *Kenyon Review* 24, 1962, Reprinted in Malin, Irving: *Saul Bellow and the Critics,* University of London Press Ltd.,1967, pp92-113, (p105).

13 Newman, Judie: *Saul Bellow and History*' St. Martin's Press, New York, (UK edition, McMillan Press Ltd.,)1984, p14.

14 Clayton; *I.D.M.* , p128.

15 Glenday; *S.B.D.H.* , p66.

16 ibid, p68.

## Chapter Four

### *Seize the Day* - A Destructive Counsel.

"The wretched mouse has by this time accumulated, in addition to the original nastiness, so many other nastinesses in the shape of questions and doubts, and so many other unresolved problems in addition to the original problem, that it has involuntarily collected around itself a fatal morass, a stinking bog, consisting of its own doubts and agitation [...]"

Dostoyevsky, *Notes from Underground*

"The feeling individual appeared weak - he felt nothing but his own weakness. But if he accepted his weakness and his separateness and descended into himself intensifying his loneliness, he discovered his solidarity with other isolated creatures."

Saul Bellow.

"With the publication of *Seize the Day*," noted Leslie Fiedler, "Saul Bellow has become not merely a writer with whom it is possible to come to terms, but one with whom it is *necessary* to come to terms."[1] And in the opinion of John J. Clayton, "*Seize the Day* is Bellow's finest novel."[2] Indeed, the critical response to Bellow's fourth novel has been of near-unanimous approbation. After what some saw as the too-sprawling design and "turgid and wooden prose"[3] of *The Adventures of Augie March*, Bellow's return in *Seize the Day* to a concentration of effect which, if anything, is even more compressed and claustrophobic than in both *Dangling Man* and *The Victim* seems to have been the primary cause of such appreciative judgements. The intense and relentlessly focussed portrayal of one day in the mismanaged life of the disaster-laden Tommy Wilhelm admits of none of the occasional frippery and whimsicality of the previous work. But the sense of inexorable fatalism which surrounds and threatens to engulf the blighted hero should not obscure the beautifully ambiguous characterisation in Seize the Day. The shuffle of the oppressed and browbeaten Wilhelm toward a certain doom, or a glorious renaissance, depending on whether an 'anti-humanist' or a 'humanist' position is adopted, might, regardless of either position, tend to elicit the reader's sympathetic

identification with this miserable and crestfallen protagonist.Yet it is impossible to agree with the critic who avers that "our sympathy [with Wilhelm] is continual in a way that it is not, for instance, with Dostoyevsky's Underground Man."[4] In the first place, it might fairly be said that our sympathy with the Underground Man *is* continual since, despite the meanness of his character and the wretchedness of his existence, he retains an incongruously pitiable feeling for 'all that is best and highest'. And although Tommy Wilhelm most definitely possesses such a feeling also, the reader does not gain the impression that this sentiment constitutes an ineradicable necessity for survival in the way that it does for the Underground Man. In the second place, our sympathy with Wilhelm is anything but continual. For although we can partly empathise with this woebegone booby, New York's very own Holy Fool, Bellow maintains an ironic distance to an extent that it is quite palpable how far Wilhelm is responsible for his plight. Moreover, the critical dispute over the conclusion of the novel, already perhaps the most controversial in the Bellow corpus, is further inflamed by this duality in Wilhelm's nature: part-victim, part(self)oppressor. It follows that the untenability of any attempt to systemize and resolve Wilhelm's situation by cleaving to a stance of affirmation, *or* denial, is also implicit. Whether the condensed form of *Seize the Day* is artistically more satisfying than the free-flowing and dispersive style of *The Adventures of Augie March* is a matter for debate. What can be established without any doubt is Tommy Wilhelm's close kinship not only to Augie but also to Joseph and Leventhal.

The details of Tommy's life constitute a litany of "so much bad luck, weariness, weakness and failure."[5] His earliest attempts to break into the acting profession have fizzled out - the theatrical agent who meets Tommy having the ironical prescience, even at that early stage of Wilhelm's life, to cast the latter as the 'loser' type, as the guy who fails the get the girl. For although Tommy in real life *does* get

the girl, his marriage ultimately collapses. Now, in middle-age, he is unemployed, having resigned from his job with a sales firm dealing in children's toys, after being virtually supplanted by a relative of the boss. And during the course of the day in which we encounter him, we see the extent of his emotional estrangement from his ex-wife, the emotional and financial estrangement from his aged father, and the wipe-out of his finances as he "haemorrhaged money"[40], swindled by Dr. Tamkin. It is certainly true that to some degree Tommy is a punchbag, a sucker, an innocent in a world full of predatory and hostile sharks. Yet he, like Leventhal, is by no means the simple 'victim' of a malign conspiracy of fate. For Tommy seems to court doom and destruction with a perverse relish. It is, after all, *he* who resigns from his job in a fit of pique. It is *he* who ditches his wife and children. And it is he who is drawn with a baleful fatality to charlatans like the impresario Maurice Venice, who turns out to be a pimp, and to Dr. Tamkin, whose doctorate, it seems, has been awarded him for services to deceit. In these circumstances, Dr. Adler's weary resentment of his son becomes a little more understandable.

The ambiguous nature of Tommy Wilhelm is hinted at in the very first paragraph of the novel:-

> When it came to concealing his troubles, Tommy Wilhelm was not less capable than the next fellow. So at least he thought, and there was a certain amount of evidence to back him up. He had once been an actor - no, not quite an actor, an extra - and he knew what acting should be. Also, he was smoking a cigar, and when a man is smoking a cigar, wearing a hat, he has an advantage; it is harder to find out how he feels.[3]

But Tommy's attempt to hide his real self with a bland mask fails:-

> ...the cigar was smoked out and the hat did not defend him. He was wrong to suppose that he was more capable than the next fellow when it came to concealing his troubles. They were clearly written out upon his face. He wasn't even aware of it.[14]

The reader, however, is still unsure that this failure to maintain a cover allows better access to a glimpse of Tommy's true self. For 'Tommy Wilhelm' is himself a false construct - this being the name which Wilhelm 'Wilky' Adler adopted in order to boost his prospects as an actor. Wilhelm claims that he can freely admit that his changed name was a mistake - but nevertheless bitterly reproaches his father for "continually remind[ing] him how he had sinned"[25]. And though Tommy believes that "Wilky was his inescapable self"[25], it is significant that 'Wilhelm' translates into 'Wilky' only in moments of drunken self-torture: "You fool, you clunk, you Wilky!"[25]. Like Augie, Tommy's self is difficult to pin down - he dangles and oscillates between the despised original self of 'Wilky' and the self of unfulfilled potential, 'Wilhelm'.

It may be wondered why Tommy is so anxious to conceal his feelings in the first place. It is because he has come to believe that his over-emotional nature is responsible for his misfortunes:-

> From his mother he had gotten sensitive feelings, a soft heart, a brooding nature, a tendency to be confused under pressure.[25]

And as he reflects on his resignation from work:-

> Feeling got me in dutch at Rojax. I had the *feeling* that I belonged to the firm and my *feelings* were hurt when they put Gerber in over me. Dad thinks I'm too simple[56].

In the world of Rojaxes, Tamkins and Adlers, Tommy may well be right to say that emotions are a liability, although, as we shall presently discover, he remains oblivious to the fact that it is only through his emotions that he can actuate the transcendent moment and find brief refuge from such an antagonistic reality. But the immediate point to be made is that Wilhelm's sensitivities are not always

extended to those around him. He, this "fair-haired hippopotamus"[6], affronts the other guests - particularly his father - with his slobbish and slovenly behaviour at the hotel where he lives:-

A faint grime was left by his fingers on the white of the egg after he had picked away the shell. Dr. Adler saw it with silent repugnance. What a Wilky he had given to the world! Why, he didn't even wash his hands in the morning [...] The doctor couldn't bear Wilky's dirty habits. Only once[...] had he visited his room [...] Wilhelm lived in worse filth than a savage.[36-37]

And although it is claimed that Wilhelm "was not really so slovenly as his father found him to be"[42], his 'finely outlined mouth' and 'gradually incurved nose', which apparently bespeak a measure of dignity, go virtually unnoticed amid the welter of grossness enveloping Wilhelm. Additionally, Wilhelm seems to rile his father quite deliberately on two occasions: once, when he waits until he is seated at the breakfast table with his father before taking his 'vitamin pills', in the full knowledge that the older man is appalled by this dependency. And again, when even though he recognises that "his father, with some justice, wanted to be left in peace"[43], he nevertheless collars him to plead for a miraculous paternal solution to his manifold problems. And when he is introduced to Mr. Perls, Wilhelm's gut reaction highlights the fact that he is not the forlorn angel we might suppose:-

'How d' do,' Wilhelm said. He did not welcome this stranger; he began at once to find fault with him [...] 'Who is this damn frazzle-faced herring with his dyed hair and his fish teeth and this drippy mustache? [...] How can a human face get into this condition. Uch!'[31]

The equivocal characterisation continues with regard to Tommy's relations with money, with the material world of the Adlers and Tamkins. Ostensibly appalled by the grubbiness of this world, Tommy fulminates:-

Uch! How they love money [...] .They adore money! Holy money! Beautiful money! It was getting so that people were feeble-minded about everything except money. While if you didn't have it you were a dummy, a dummy! You had to excuse yourself from the face of the earth. Chicken! that's what it was. The world's business. If only he could find a way out of it.[36]

Yet, far from seeking an exit route from "the world's business", there is a disturbing suspicion that Tommy's *real* desire is to gain entry *into* it. There is a strong sense that Tommy believes that money can solve all his problems. In his febrile longing to make a killing on the stock market, Wilhelm wilfully relegates to the background all of his crowding doubts about Tamkin's sincerity:-

But oh! If I could only work out a little steady income from this. Not much. I don't ask much. But how badly I need -! I'd be so grateful if you'd show me how to work it.[10]

Moreover, when, in response to one of his son's frequently supplications about money, Dr. Adler tells Wilhelm to "carry nobody on his back", Tommy explodes:-

...you hate me. And if I had money you wouldn't. By God, you have to admit it. The money makes the difference. Then we would be a fine father and son [...] Just keep your money [...] Keep it and enjoy it yourself. That's the ticket![55]

It may be argued that Tommy is here merely articulating his frustration at the savage materialism of those around him. True enough, as Dr. Adler invariably interprets his son's cries as being solely of a financial nature. But Tommy should realise, better than anyone, that, for all his wealth, Dr. Adler is unable to enjoy his money, thanks to his obsessive and neurotic fear of death (and his equally obsessive and neurotic fear that someone will relieve him of his funds). The possession of money in itself solves nothing - and it certainly would do nothing for Wilhelm. In any case, Tommy is not quite so adept at articulating himself when charged by his father that his economic bondage to his ex-wife is entirely his own fault: Wilhelm "could not speak for a while, dumb and incompetent, he struggled for breath and frowned with

effort into his father's face"[49]. (This scene, incidentally, is paralleled almost exactly in Wilhelm's response of stuttering inconsequentiality to the question of why he had to leave his wife). And, in a typically playful moment, Bellow shows us that Wilhelm's supposed unworldliness does not extend to his nous in dating his cheque one day ahead of Tamkin's in their joint funding effort for the stock market operation.

There is evidence to suggest that Tommy, like the Underground Man, actually thrives on failure and suffering, revels in the awareness of his own humiliation (and, in truth, there seems to be little room for debate about where this idea comes from). This is not only implied in his actions - he pays his ex-wife amounts of alimony which no court would have awarded her, and has a propensity finally to plump for a course of action he has rejected innumerable times before, particularly with regard to Tamkin, as when, "from the moment [...] he tasted the peculiar flavour of fatality in Dr. Tamkin, he could no longer keep back the money"[58]. This tendency is also explicit in his thought processes:-

> From a deeper source, however, came other promptings. If he didn't keep his troubles before him he risked losing them altogether, and he knew by experience that this was worse.[43]

and:-

> Once a guy starts to slip, he figures he might as well be a clunk. A real big clunk. He even takes pride in it.[47]

Wilhelm is oblivious to the advice of both Adler and Tamkin not to "marry suffering" - evidently because he is so suited to the role of the groom. It is difficult to maintain a view of Wilhelm as a sympathetically artless dope when he wallows in disappointments like this.

Wilhelm's most damaging deceptions are perpetrated upon himself. Most important, and most tragic of all (and it is a feature which, to the best of my knowledge, has gone undetected by critics of the novel) is Tommy's failure to realise that it is the whole 'seize the day' ethos which is the *cause* of his trouble. This philosophy is articulated by Tamkin:-

> The spiritual compensation is what I look for. Bringing people into the here-and-now. The real universe. That's the present moment. The past is no good to us. The future is full of anxiety. Only the present is real - the here-and-now. Seize the Day.[66]

Wilhelm comments that "I like what you say about here-and-now"[66]. And Sarah Blacher Cohen advises that "The fact remains that Tamkin's advice is essentially correct. Wilhelm must seize the day."[6] But this is precisely what he should *not* do - For he has suffered from doing so all of his life. From his earliest days Wilhelm "had been eager for life to start"[23]. It is this impatience that precipitates his headlong rush into failed marriages, pointless careers and stupid schemes. It is this philosophy, the philosophy that, as his ex-wife points out to him, "every other day you want to make a new start"[112], which plunges him into chaos and futility (what better example is there than that of Tamkin's here-and-now plan for playing the markets - a plan which bleeds Wilhelm dry?). And it is the frenetic madness and agitation of the here-and-now view which can only be countered, as was touched upon earlier, by transcendence actuated by memory and emotion. The visionary breakthroughs which sporadically invade Tommy's consciousness oppose and overturn 'seize the day', and act as oases where Tommy finds peace and contentment. Wilhelm shows that he is a "visionary sort of animal"[39] on numerous occasions - but his visions, as for every other Bellow hero, are fleeting and elusive:-

The spirit, the peculiar burden of his existence lay upon him like an accretion, a load, a hump. In any moment of quiet, when sheer fatigue prevented him from struggling, he was apt to feel this mysterious weight, this growth or collection of nameless things which it was the business of his life to carry about. That must be what a man was for [...] Who has to believe that he can know why he exists. Though he has never seriously tried to find out why.[38-39]

In his epiphanies, he recalls he tranquillity of his soul at moments during his past life:-

When he was with the Rojax corporation Wilhelm had kept a small apartment in Roxbury [...] and on mornings of leisure, in late spring weather like this, he used to sit expanded in a wicker chair with the sunlight pouring through the weave, and sunlight through the slug-eaten holes of the young hollyhocks and as deeply as the grass allowed into small flowers. This peace (he forgot that that time had its troubles, too), this peace had gone.[42-43]

For several moments of peace he was removed to his small yard at Roxbury.
He breathed in the sugar of the pure morning.
He heard the long phrases of the birds.
No enemy wanted his life.[82]

And is prompted into a powerful but transient love for his ex-wife:-

Twenty years ago, in a neat blue wool suit, in a soft hat made of the same cloth - he could plainly see her. He stooped his yellow head and looked under the hat at her clear, simple face, her living eyes moving, her straight small nose, her jaw beautifully, painfully clear in its form. It was a cool day but he smelled the odour of pines in the sun, in the granite canyon. Just south of Santa Barbara, this was.[95]

his father:-

'You love your old man?'
Wilhelm grasped at this. 'Of course, of course I love him' [...] As he said this there was a great pull at the very center of his soul [...] Wilhelm never identified what struck within him. It did not reveal itself. It got away.[92-93]

and his fellow creatures:-

...all of a sudden, unsought, a general love for all these imperfect and lurid-loking people burst out in Wilhelm's breast. He loved them. One and all, he passionately loved them [...] On that very same afternoon he didn't hold so high an opinion of this on-rush of loving kindness [...] It was only another one of those subway things. Like having a hard-on at random.[84-85]

In sum, these visions produce in Wilhelm a feeling of sweet distress:-

The name of a soul, however, must be only that - soul. What did it look like? Does my soul look like me? [...] Where does the true soul get its strength? Why does it have to love truth? Wilhelm was tormented, but tried to be oblivious to his torment.[72]

It is worth quoting these passages at some length in order to emphasise what Wilhelm is capable of. Such interludes of refulgent beauty immeasurably enhance his status, particularly if one is seeking to place Wilhelm within a humanist perspective. But it is Wilhelm's fate that he should be forever turning "from these wide considerations to the problems of the moment"[99] - and thus it is that he is undone. Even old Mr. Rappaport, who seizes the day *every* day on the stock market, nevertheless clings to the 'wider consideration' of his memories of his encounter with Teddy Roosevelt, allowing him to escape the here-and-now. And yet, as always in Bellow's fiction, nothing is as cut-and-dried as it may seem. For Wilhelm's visions, for all their radiant glory, are a recipe for passivity and stagnation, an opting out of reality, and just as restrictive and binding as resignation to the turmoil of the here-and-now. The very existence of these sublime moments shows that Wilhelm is not utterly resigned to the maelstrom of the present - yet their brief nature means that he must involve himself in a turbulent actuality. Tommy, like Joseph, Leventhal and Augie, finds himself in the middle - a dangling man.

Perhaps the most important aspect of *Seize the Day*, and certainly the one which tends to make the the greatest impression on the reader, is, as in *The Victim*, the lack of empathy and communication between people. Contact is perfunctory and shallow, intimacy non-existent. Tommy's view is that "I am an idiot. I have no reserve [...] I talk. I must ask for it. Everybody wants to have intimate conversations, but the smart fellows don't give out, only the fools"[38]. In this world where everyone attempts to conceal their troubles, there is emotional blockage: a wall is erected by Dr. Adler so that "His own son, his one and only son, could not speak his mind or ease his heart to him"[10] - Wilhelm's desperate pleas for help fall upon deaf ears - and the frosty relations between Wilhelm and his ex-wife simply engender more confusion and suffering. Moreover, there is also a blockage on simple understanding in the modern-day Babel of New York:-

> And was everybody crazy here? What sort of people did you see? Every other man spoke a language entirely his own, which he had figured out by private thinking; he had his own ideas and peculiar ways [...] You had to translate and translate, explain and explain, back and forth, and it was the punishment of hell itself not to understand or be understood, not to know the crazy from the sane, the wise from the fools, the young from the old or the sick from the well [...] You had to talk with yourself in the daytime and reason with yourself at night. Who else was there to talk to in a city like New York?[83-84]

"Communication," Bellow has said, "is what is most notably absent in modern life, despite the fact that people are ostensibly informed".[7] And this where one of Bellow's most glorious creations comes in - the grotesque mountebank, Dr. Tamkin, "the confuser of the imagination"[43]. If the likes of Adler and Rubin give out too little, then Tamkin gives out too much. Yet he is not, in Tommy's terms, an emotional fool who cannot stay reticent. Tamkin's torrent of information, diagnoses, solutions, advice of every kind is calculated to damage genuine human connection and to deceive the gullible. He is the first fully realized characterisation of a type that would become familiar in later novels, reaching an apogee in Dewey

Spangler in *The Dean's December.* Tamkin, it seems to me, is the hideous embodiment of Ortega y Gasset's "mass-man", and there is good evidence for this belief. Bellow has written a foreword to Ortega's *The Revolt of the Masses*, and comments as follows:-

> Ortega when he speaks of the mass man does not refer to the proletariat; he does not mean us to think of any social class whatever. To him the mass man is an altogether new human type. Lawyers in the courtroom, judges on the bench, surgeons bending over anaesthetized patients, international bankers, men of science, millionaires in their private jets are, despite their education, their wealth or their power, almost invariably mass men, differing in no important aspect from TV repair men, clerks in Army-Navy stores, municipal fire-inspectors, or bartenders.[8]

Moreover:-

> ...the mass man lacks seriousness. With him nothing is for real, all parts are interchangeable. For him everything is provisional. He may occasionally play at tragedy, but the prevailing mood is one of farce.[9]

The result:-

> The opening up of life and the world for the mediocre man has led him to shut up his soul. It is the obliteration of the average soul upon which the rebellion of the masses is founded.[10]

Taking Bellow's comments in conjunction with Ortega's own representations of what constitutes the mass man, the conclusion that Tamkin is the result of the fusion of certain fundamental ideas with Bellow's imagination becomes irresistible:-

> A characteristic of our times is the predominance, even in those groups who were traditionally selective, of mass and popular vulgarity. Even in intellectual life, which by its very essence assumes and requires certain qualifications, we see the progressive triumph of pseudo-intellectuals - unqualified, unqualifiable and, in their own context, disqualified.[11]

and:-

The characteristic note of our time is the dire truth that the mediocre soul, the commonplace mind, knowing itself to be mediocre, has the gall to assert its right to mediocrity, and goes on to impose itself wherever it can.[12]

It goes against the grain of this study to delve into the pit of associationism[13] (for it is a characteristic of the mass man to do so!) but on this occasion the parallels are overwhelming. Tamkin, the 'qualified' Doctor, with his vulgarised mish-mash of "the rags and tatters of the world's great intellectual and religious heritages,"[14] allied to the way he bends these to ignoble and farcical applications, and his spouting of inane and vacuous gobbledegook which nevertheless possesses the power to half-convince - these traits combine to make him the quintessential purveyor of a mediocre wisdom and a terrifyingly banal domination. There is even little doubt that Tamkin has "shut up his soul", for the deep-hidden unease of this comic-pathetic figure occasionally manifests itself to Wilhelm:-

When his hypnotic spell failed, his big underlip made him look weak-minded. Fear stared from his eyes, so humble as to make you feel sorry for him. Once or twice Wilhelm had seen that look. Like a dog, he thought.[96]

Tamkin himself is awash with paradox. He is both "sane and crazy"[41], his supposed "calm and rational approach"[10] to the money market contrasts sharply with his avowed restlessness in the presence of money[9], and his view that money constitutes one of the forces inimical to life is juxtaposed with his speculative astuteness on the market. His mixture of gimcrack spirituality and inspired crassness is apotheosised in his superbly puerile piece of doggerel which utterly bewilders Wilhelm. It is only now, almost forty years after the publication of the novel, as the language and non-ideas of Tamkin are in reality moulded into a homogeneous mass and disseminated through the various media, cultural institutions and business - in every walk of life, it seems - and become ever more

common currency, that we can realise Bellow's prescience when he created this figure. Unfortunately for Tommy, he is not quite so observant.

And so to an analysis of the novel's conclusion, a conclusion which, as was mentioned earlier, is probably the most controversial ever penned by Bellow. Robert Baker had noted that "...the ending of *Seize the Day* is several cuts above those of the other three novels"[15] and, if the level of discussion it has generated is any guide, then this is surely true. Tommy has mistakenly wandered into a funeral parlour, where he is confronted by the corpse of a total stranger. This provokes the release of the pent-up emotions which have gathered in him during this day:-

> The flowers and lights fused ecstatically in Wilhelm's blind, wet eyes; the heavy sea-like music came up to his ears. It poured into him where he had hidden himself in the center of a crowd by the great and happy oblivion of tears. He heard it and sank deeper than sorrow, through torn sobs and cries to the consummation of his heart's ultimate need.[118]

Is this the moment when Wilhelm is able to resolve the contradictions of his existence and achieve a lasting, 'humanist' perspective? Eusebio Rodrigues certainly thinks so - *"Seize the Day* ends at the moment when the doors of perception fling open, and Wilhelm realises his heart's ultimate need, a feeling of brotherhood and a love for all mankind."[16] Ralph Freedman concurs, sensing that Wilhelm "rises from self-pity to universal mourning and therefore a degree of self-transcendence. External and internal perception unite, as Wilhelm both recognises and is recognised as a symbolic brother."[17] M. Gilbert Porter views the scene as indicative of Wilhelm's discovery of his 'real self': "In destroying the pretender soul, Wilhelm prepares for the coming of the true soul [...] Where there has been alienation, there is now the possibility of communion. Wilhelm's drowning, then, is also a baptism, a rebirth."[18] John J. Clayton adopts a similar position: "... it is this pretender soul which Tommy Wilhelm must destroy in order that he, as representative man, may

shine forth in glory, power, beauty - and that Bellow may affirm the beauty and greatness of man."[19]

Or is it possible that Tommy weeps out of defeat and resignation, a desire for refuge and annihilation? Jonathan Wilson avers that Wilhelm's tears constitute "a denial of sheer reality itself."[20] Michael Glenday goes to town on Tommy, asserting that "Hopelessness is [...] very much Bellow's theme here, a profound hopelessness which seems to me deepened by the novel's much discussed final scene"; that "the language used by Bellow in the concluding paragraph cannot possibly uphold the range of affirmative meanings so often thought to reside there [...] Such meanings cannot be discovered elsewhere in the unrelentingly miserable sequence of events that make up Tommy's day"; and that "not only the language but also the context of this final scene appears to demonstrate [...] his awful isolation within the crowd, his emotional release figured as a sinking downwards towards extravagant oblivion."[21] It will be evident that, once again, whether one interprets the final scene as"a strongly promising or optimistic one"[22] to bolster the humanist case, or the novel as one "that ought to have done more to dispel the widely-held view of its author as one committed to humanism",[23] both perspectives are contingent to a substantial degree on the predisposition of the critic. Both views have something to be said for them - but both are essentially incorrect. The evidence suggests that Tommy's contradictory nature will leave him forever 'dangling'. I think it is significant that Bellow writes that Tommy is pointed *toward* the "consummation of his heart's ultimate need" -for he will never truly achieve it. We have no good reason to believe that Tommy's final lyric moment will be any less transient than his brief visions detailed earlier. Conversely, the very fact that we take our leave of him while he experiences another of these visions suggests that 'oblivion' is not on his agenda - *these* are the affirmative meanings to be discovered during Tommy's day.

Wilhelm complains that "This has been one of those days [...] May I never live to go through another like it"[111]. But if we bear in mind the assertion of Tommy's ex-wife quoted earlier - "every other day you want to make a new start" - we gain the distinct impression that not only is nothing to be resolved one way or another by the events of *this* day, but also that Tommy may very well live to go through many *more* such days. Days of fleeting transcendence, ephemeral peace, bitter exasperation and unruly absurdity. The reader has in some sense witnessed a snapshot, a microcosm of the life of Tommy Wilhelm, one day has been seized from his existence for our inspection - and if we scrutinise it carefully we discover that he is ultimately no different from any other Bellow hero. The most appropriate , and lasting, image we have of Tommy is very well crystallised in the film of the novel (the only one of Bellow's works to have been filmed). The actor Robin Williams, who plays Tommy, seems to convey the impression that Tommy is both weeping *and* laughing in the closing scene - a neat balance to reflect Wilhelm's occupation of the unstable centre.

References

The epigraphs are, respectively:-

Dostoyevsky, Fyodor: *Notes from Underground*, Penguin Classics, Penguin Books, London, England, 1972, p21.

Bellow, Saul: "The Nobel Lecture", *American Scholar 46* (1977) pp316-325, (p.317), (alluding to Conrad's preface to *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, pp316-325.

[1] Fiedler, Leslie A.: 'Saul Bellow', reprinted in Malin, Irving: *Saul Bellow and the Critics*, University of London Press Limited, 1967, pp1-9, (p1).

[2] Clayton; *I.D.M.* , p247.

[3] Geismar, Maxwell: "Saul Bellow: Novelist of the Intellectuals", reprinted in *Malin, S.B.C.* pp10-24, (p18).

[4] Trowbridge, Clinton W.:"Water Imagery in *Seize the Day*" *Critique* 9, (Spring 1968) pp.62-73; Cited in Porter, M.Gilbert: Whence the Power? The Artistry and Humanity of Saul Bellow,University of Missouri Press, 1974, p.103.

[5] Bellow Saul: *Seize the Day*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, England, 1956, p11. All subsequent page references are taken from this edition and are cited in the main body of the text.

[6] Cohen, Sarah Blacher: *Saul Bellow's Enigmatic Laughter*, University of Illinois ress, Urbana, 1974, p107.

[7] Bragg, Melvyn: "Saul Bellow talks about his new novel", *London Review of Books*, 6-19 May, 1982, p22.

[8] Bellow, Saul: 'Foreword' to Ortega y Gasset, Jose: *The Revolt of the Masses*, translated by Anthony Kerrigan, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana, 1985 pp.ix-xiii, (p.ix).

[9] ibid: p.x-xi.

[10] ibid: p.xi.

[11] Ortega y Gasset, Jose: *The Revolt of the Masses*, translated by Anthony Kerrigan, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana, 1985 p8.

[12] ibid: p10.

[13] By "associationism" I mean a critical tendency to associate the text in hand with something 'other' than the text, whether that be other texts, ideas, ideologies etc. This is often done with the object of undermining the creativity of the author. I do not use the word 'intertextuality' since it tends to lend a veneer of dignity to this process.

[14] Chase,Richard: "The Adventures of Saul Bellow: The Progress of a Novelist", *Commentary* 27, April, 1959: reprinted in Malin, pp25-38, ( p31).

[15] Baker, Robert: "Bellow Comes of Age", Chicago Review, 11 (1957), reprinted in Trachtenberg, pp26-29, (p 29).

[16] Rodrigues; *Q.F.T.H.* , p106.

[17] Freedman., Ralph: "Saul Bellow: The Illusion of Environment", *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature,* 1, Winter 1960: reprinted in Malin, *S.B.C.*, pp51-68, (p59).

[18] Porter, M. Gilbert: "The Scene as Image: *A Reading of Seize the Day*", Rovit ed, *Saul Bellow: A Collection of Critical Essays*, pp52-71, (p70).

[19] Clayton*: I.D.M. , p94.*

[20] Wilson: *O.B.P.*, p111.

[21] Glenday: *S.B.D.H.* , pp71, 71, 74.

[22]Siegel, Ben: "Artists and Opportunists in Saul Bellow's *Humboldt's Gift*", *Contemporary Literature,* Spring 1978, reprinted in Trachtenberg, *C.E.S.B.* pp158-174, (p.171).

[23] Glenday, p80.

## Chapter Five

### *Henderson the Rain King* - Life of Continual Becoming

"Conclusion
Without fulfilment. Thence the dream rose upward ,
The living dream sprang from the dying vision,
Overarching all. Beneath its branches
He builds in faith and doubt his shaking house."
Edwin Muir, 'The Mythical Journey'.

"Books," notes Bellow, "are strongly shaken to see what usable things will fall out of them to strengthen a theory or support some system of ideas. The poet becomes a sort of truffle hound who brings marvelous delicacies from the forest. The writer himself begins to accept this truffle-hound role, acknowledging the superior value, the greater dignity of ideas and explanations over fancy, play, verve - over imagination."[1] And on another occasion he comments that, "What has been substituted for the novel itself is what can be said about the novel by the 'educated'."[2] Bellow's fifth novel, *Henderson the Rain King*, has been put through the mill of Symbolic - or, more properly *associative* -readings and interpretations (although it is to be feared that even now we have seen only the tip of the iceberg in this regard).[3] Not every critic is guilty of sinning in this respect, of course, but those who are make an ever-increasing din. Exactly what purpose is served by an associative interpretation is unclear. Assuming that no novelist sits down to write with an expres intention of demonstrating, say, the theories of Wilhelm Reich in action,[4] - for what could be more futile, tedious, derivative and ultimately self-defeating? - then the responsibility for the imposition of such a view on the original novel lies solely with the critic. The problem with the associative tendency is that it can, like statistics, be employed to prove virtually anything - anything, that is, which accords with the critic's own notions. This invariably leads to readings which are arid and stupefyingly irrelevant. To be fair to critics of such a bent, Bellow hardly discouraged their earnest search by creating such a potentially fertile source of symbolic readings as *Henderson the Rain King* (to the extent that he felt compelled

to issue what amounted to a 'health warning' a week before publication of the novel[5]). For instance, I have no doubt that an ineffably turgid treatise could be constructed around the 'deeper meanings' to Henderson's history of dental trouble! John J. Clayton, though, is quite right in his speculation that Bellow seems to have said to his critical audience, "You want a symbolic novel? I'll give you the most symbolic novel you ever wrote a critical article about."[6] For the thrust of the novel is substantially comic and any symbolic references overtly parodic. And, to state it baldly, it is *this* novel which will be under discussion - not Reich, Freud, Eden or the History of Man. The foolery in *Henderson* itself is enough to be going on with. But Bellow has averred that his "fooling [in Henderson] was fairly serious".[7] So let us also be serious.

Superficially, the character of Henderson himself may seem to be unique among Bellow's fictional main players. Only Augie appears to approximate even remotely to him. Henderson is an extrovert, rumbustious and bellicose, something of a philistine ("...he can sound like Daddy Warbucks trying to explain Spinoza."[8]), "moody, rough, tyrannical and probably mad."[9] When we first encounter him, it is obvious that not only is he indifferent to the needs and sensibilities of others - like Augie, he cannot "be hurt enough by the fate of other people" - but is also himself some way down a spiral of self-destruction. Thus it is that he involves himself in adulterous behaviour; brawls drunkenly with state troopers; makes a nuisance of himself with firearms (including taking a potshot at an abandoned cat in his attic); and tortures his wife with a threat to blow his own brains out, in the full knowledge that his wife's father had died in just such a fashion. Moreover, he declines to aid the poverty-stricken Russian prince from whom he rents a Paris apartment - even though he, Henderson, is a millionaire; deliberately riles his army friend Goldstein by informing the latter that he wishes to breed pigs after the war; and - worst of all - one of his violent paroxysms of rage seems to cause the death of his elderly housekeeper. As Keith Opdahl rightly points out, "Henderson suffers from his own

malice toward others."[10] And we may also add that he suffers from his own malice toward *himself*, riddled with guilt as he is over his failure to match the standards of his illustrious lineage, and deeply troubled by the consciousness on his part that something in his life is missing, something remains unfulfilled, there is an unsatiated desire for something *more* which needs to be met. It is this consciousness which speaks to him in a voice of chaotic, frenzied craving:-

> I came, a great weight, a huge shadow on those stairs, with my face full of country colour and booze, and yellow pigskin gloves on my hands, and a ceaseless voice in my heart that said, I want, I want, oh, I want - yes, go on, I said to myself, Strike, strike, strike, strike![12]

and again:-

> Now I have already mentioned that there was a disturbance in my heart, a voice that spoke there and said, I want, I want, I want! It happened every afternoon, and when I tried to suppress it it got even stronger. It only said one thing, I want, I want! And I would ask, "What do you want?"
> But this was all it would ever tell me. It never said a thing except I want, I want, I want![24]

It is this unquenchable longing which, in turn, causes Henderson to embark on his quest to fabled 'darkest Africa', in a strangely random, vaguely conceived attempt to discover meaning to his life and quell the turbulent, importunate voice within. And it would be remiss not to mention the fact that Henderson prefaces the descriptions of his wild excesses and brutal indifference with the claim, post-quest, that "the world which I thought so mighty an oppressor has removed its wrath from me"[3]. This comment seems to suggest that some sort of transformation has taken place, that Henderson is a new man - and that the humanist critics may have found their champion at last. But is it so? A perfunctory appraisal of Eugene H. Henderson might, as has been said, mark him out as a singular member of the Bellow cast - but on a more thorough investigation it becomes abundantly clear that he, too, is a dangling tenant of the middle-ground.

It seems to me that there are three separately identifiable, though closely linked facets of Henderson's putative journey of discovery. The first involves the relationship between what we usually take to be the distinct and mutually hostile forces of Life and Death. In Henderson's mind there is a curious overlapping and blurring of the boundaries between the two - and this confusion is often reinforced by events in the world which Henderson encounters. "What Henderson is really seeking," Bellow has said, "is a remedy to the anxiety over death."[11] And it is apparent that the striving, frenetic inner voice which actuates Henderson is nothing less than a life-impulse, a bulwark of the will against death. The spirit of 'I want' cries out in opposition to the void. The life-desire is enhanced in Henderson's upbeat conviction that the dominion of death has its limits, evidenced when he tries to commune musically with the soul of his dead father:-

> I had felt I was pursuing my father's spirit, whispering, "Oh, Father, Pa. Do you recognize the sounds? This is me, Gene, on your violin, trying to reach you." For it so happens that I have never been able to convince myself the dead are utterly dead.[30]

and again, when he is faced with the challenge of disposing of the Wariri corpse:-

> I believe in Lazarus. I believe in the awakening of the dead. I am sure that for some, at least, there is a resurrection.[140]

Yet this same Henderson is obsessed by an equally powerful death-impulse. He believes himself to be possessed of a "great death potential"[252], and is made to feel "very bitter" when his wife describes him as "unkillable"[6]. Moreover, he is subject to horrific visions of the doom which awaits him, in the chillingly portentous form of the dead-eyed octopus which he encounters in a French aquarium:-

> It was twilight. I looked in at an octopus, and the creature seemed also to look at me and press its soft head to the glass...The eyes spoke to me coldly. But even more speaking, even more cold, was the soft head with its speckles, and the Brownian motion in those speckles, a cosmic coldness in which I felt I was dying [...] I thought, 'This is my last day. Death is giving me notice'.[14]

And again, the sight of the knick-knackery in his deceased housekeeper's room provokes a terrible revelation:-

> And I thought, "Oh shame, shame! Oh crying shame! How can we? Why do we allow ourselves? What are we doing? The last little room of dirt is waiting. Without windows [...] You, too, will die of this pestilence. Death will annihilate you and nothing will remain, and there will be nothing left but junk. Because nothing will have been and so nothing will be left".[40]

Curiously, Henderson submits that "all the major tasks and the big conquests were done before my time. That left the biggest problem of all which was to encounter death"[276]. Because earlier he had claimed to have become "ultrafamiliar with death" and that "Death and I are just about kissing cousins"[174]. Similarly, he rejects any notion that he "love[s] death" [140], yet he revels in meting it out to the frogs blocking the Arnewi water supply, and is latterly possessed by a furious urge to kill the Wariri tribesman who is the Bunam's assistant. Indeed, the contradictions and paradoxes involving Life and Death are heightened during his experiences in Africa. When Henderson encounters the Arnewi tribe, he is vouchsafed the spirit of *grun-tu-molani* - Man want to live - by the tribal matriarch. But this insight into an elemental 'life-force' comes from a people who have so transcended the world that they appear passive and vegetated - and virtually dead themselves (indeed, they will allow their cattle to die rather than act to save their water supply). When Henderson lifts the idol to become rain-king of the Wariri, he feels the spirit's sleep bursting again, proclaiming "Life anew! I was still alive and kicking and I had the old *grun-tu-molani*"[193]. Ironically, however, by this action he mires himself in a web of archaic savagery and condemns himself to certain death if he remains among the Wariri. Most paradoxical of all is the basis for King Dahfu's attempt to inculcate Henderson in the 'spirit of the lion'. Henderson is supposed to be infused with wild, free, natural impulses - an energy of life in itself - derived from the instincts of Dahfu's lion Atti. Yet such impulses are to come from an animal which is caged and tamed. When the *real* wild animal is confronted - an unbridled and basic life-force -

Henderson not only fears that "this was all mankind needed, to be conditioned into the image of a ferocious animal like the one below"[307], but also witnesses the death-dealing capacity of the beast, in the brutal killing of Dahfu. And, in consequence of this assertion of primitive 'life-energy', Henderson is propelled into a nightmarish, life-threatening situation himself by being forced to assume the title of the new king. Finally, even after his adventures, it is clear that Henderson's impressions still fluctuate wildly - his life-impulse (as vague and ambiguous as it might be) crowds, clashes and interchanges with his terror of death (as animating and thrilling though it might be). Henderson, virtually in the same breath, is able to meditate on his impending extinction:-

> I couldn't get enough of the water, and of these upside down sierras of the clouds. Like courts of eternal heaven ( only they aren't eternal, that's the whole thing; they are seen once and never seen again, being figures and not abiding realities; Dahfu will never be seen again, and presently I will never be seen again ... [333]

and then restate the possibility of the triumph of life:-

> Two smoothly grey eyes moved at me, greatly expanded into the whites - new to life altogether. They had that new luster. With it they had ancient power, too. You could never convince me that *this was for the first time.*[339]

Fluid, contradictory, ambiguous, a world of no fixed states or certainties - that is the world of the typically 'dangling' Bellow hero.

The second facet of Henderson's quest, and one which takes place almost by accident, involves itself with questions on the nature of reality. It is, of course, a deliberately comic incongruity on Bellow's part to plunge "this pitiful rude man, this poor stumbling bully"[199] into speculations of this sort. Nevertheless, as Daniel Hughes has pointed out, "...he [Henderson] is searching for a reality, a reality which [...] can be shown conclusively to be something other than himself."[12] Hughes' comment, though, is only half right - for the fact is that Henderson has no clear idea

of what he is seeking, displays disordered and anomalous attitudes to 'reality', and finds that a concrete conception of such is elusive. From such an unreserved and experiential character as Henderson, more than a passing acquaintance with 'real life' would be expected. And, indeed, Henderson boasts of his knowledge more than once. To his wife:-

> Lily said, "Oh, Gene, I'm very glad." She gave me a high mark for this and told me, "It's good that you are more able to accept reality."
> "What?" I said, "I know more about reality than you'll ever know. I am on damned good terms with reality, and don't you forget it".[36]

Despite this, however, Henderson refuses to accept the 'reality' of his daughter's love (and possible parenthood) of the negro child, preferring that this latter be given into care. He then smugly congratulates himself on his ability to accept things the way they are:-

> I have always argued that Lily neither knows nor likes reality. Me? I love the old bitch just the way she is and I like to think that I am always prepared for even the very worst she can show me. I am a true adorer of life, and if I can't reach as high as the face of it, I plant my kiss somewhere lower down.[150]

This view is somewhat surprising considering that not so long before, Henderson had brought down a catastrophic and devastating reality upon the Arnewi (by means of his bungled attempt to clear their water supply), and had himself crept away in shame and disgrace. Seemingly unabashed, he later informs Dahfu as to what constitutes the real love of his life:-

> When you come right down to it, there aren't many guys who have stuck with real life through thick and thin, like me. It's my most basic loyalty [...] I love the stuff. *Grun-tu-molani*![232]

Again, this assertion is more than a touch debatable. Prior to making this claim, Henderson had made a desperately absurd plea for deliverance from the 'ultimate reality' of the rain-king's initiation ceremony - ultimate in the sense that Henderson

had earlier equated truth with blows[23], many of which he receives during the performance of this ritual:-

> And with all my heart I yelled, "Mercy, have mercy!" And after that I yelled, "No, justice!" And after that I changed my mind and cried, "No, no, truth, truth!" And then, "Thy will be done! Not my will, but Thy will!"[199]

It would seem that not only is reality unbearable in this instance, but truth is to be sought elsewhere than in blows. Moreover, Henderson's bragging about his love of 'reality' is put to flight in the face of the terrible reality of the lion that will slay Dahfu:-

> But oh, unreality! Unreality, unreality! That has been my scheme for a troubled but eternal life. But now I was blasted away from this practice by the throat of the lion.[307]

Yet even this statement requires qualification. Henderson is a war veteran, informing us that "the war meant much to me"[22]. He himself has stepped on a land mine, and must have faced death on several.occasions amidst the cruelties and atrocities of war. Can we believe that his life up to the confrontation with the lion was - unreality? Henderson had, in any case, referred, in another vague orison, to the leonine proclivities of the Wariri as 'unreality':-

> 'Oh, you [...] Something,' I said, 'you Something because of whom there is not Nothing. Help me to do thy will [...] Heavenly Father, open up my dumb heart and for Christ's sake preserve me from unreal things. Oh, Thou who tookest me from pigs, let me not be killed over lions.[253]

It is hardly a surprise that when such a confused and confusing picture emerges from Henderson's experiences with 'reality', his meditations on the subject are in equal disarray. When he opines that "...reality may be terrible [...] [but] it's better than what I've got"[105], his later imprecation "Reality! Oh reality! Damn you anyhow, reality!"[291] seems entirely in keeping with the flux of his nature. As does his view that "it's love that makes reality reality"[286] ( a signpost at which the

humanist critic can heave a sigh of relief) - a view which seems to take no account of his assertion, enunciated only just before, that "that word [love] is full of bluff"[284]. And when Henderson arrives at the 'profound' revelation that reality consists of an individual's own creations:-

> What we call reality is nothing but pedantry[...] I need not have had that quarrel with Lily [...] I proclaimed I was on better terms with the real than she [...] The world of facts is real, all right, and not to be altered [...] But then there is the noumenal department, and there we create and create and create. As we tread our overanxious ways, we think we know what is real. And I was telling the truth to Lily after a fashion. I knew it better, all right, but I knew it because it was mine - filled, flowing and floating with my own resemblances; as hers was with *her* resemblances. Oh, what a revelation! Truth spoke to me. To *me*, Henderson![167]

the reader expects to encounter a blatant contradiction of this insight - and Henderson does not disappoint:-

> Well, maybe every guy has his own Africa. Or if he goes to sea, his own ocean. By which I meant that as I was a turbulent individual, I was having a turbulent Africa. This is not to say, however, that I think the world exists for my sake. No, I really believe in reality. That's a known fact.[276]

Small wonder, then, that it is Henderson's groggy, plangent cry that "everything depends on the values - the values. And where's reality? I ask you, where is it?"[87] which we place most store by. In this sense, Henderson demonstrates the inaccuracy of Jonathan Wilson's insistence that "If the Bellow hero is to continue 'dangling', his options must always gradually close down."[13] For Henderson's options remain open, exceptionally variegated, his farrago of shifting perspectives ensuring that he is placed in a nebulous, indeterminate region - the ultimate 'dangler' in a world constantly in a state of change. And yet Henderson, like the other Bellow heroes, is offered an imaginative and spiritual escape route from the turmoil and uproar of his life - and if ever there was a case of the authentic voice of Bellow intruding upon his fiction, then it is surely heard in the following conjecture articulated by the supposedly philistine Henderson:-

What? Well, for instance, that chaos doesn't run the whole show. That this is not a sick and hasty ride, helpless, through a dream into oblivion. No, sir! It can be arrested by a thing or two. By art, for instance.[175-76]

Leaving aside the incongruity of this declaration coming from Eugene H. Henderson, it is nevertheless true that it is in the 'unreality' of aesthetic visions and memories where Henderson achieves a kind of contentment - short-lived and subject to dissolution though these are. Dahfu, just as Tamkin had done with Tommy in *Seize the Day*, instructed Henderson to allow the king's lion Atti to "force the present moment upon [him]"[260]. Yet Dahfu's advice, if not as wilfully malicious as that of Tamkin, is still just as wrong - only in the past, and in the brief periods of artistic, if not religious, transcendence does Henderson approach an awareness of the reason for, and the meaning of, his existence. It is surely significant that Henderson not only relates his African experiences in retrospect, but also states that "something of the highest importance has been presented to me [...] as in a dream"[22], for at least some of the aspects of his odyssey have ben sublimated into visionary and ethereal states, the remembrance of which outweighs in importance even their actuality. Thus Henderson's 'pink light' epiphany, "the fringe of Nirvana"[102]; Mtalba's dance of seduction which causes him to ache with beauty[98]; the faint indications of a benign deity already cited; and the blissful recollections which he owns "have made a sizeable difference to me"[336] -these are the intangibles which transport Henderson to a realm of imaginative tranquility. But again, for the Bellow hero these visions are of their very nature transient - as Henderson puts it, "I grow confused, my breast melts, and then bang, the thing is gone. Once more I'm on the wrong side of it"[98]. And it must not be forgotten that Henderson's capacity for enlightenment can also make him "crazy with misery"[29], also allowing, as it does, of stark and frightening intimations of death which, as we have already noted, continue to surface even after his return from Africa. His consciousness admits of both extremes without being annexed by either. 'Truth' is never fully equated with either reality or with the vigour of an inspired 'unreality'.

Keith Opdahl's declaration that "By the end of his African journey, Henderson can face both the internal and external reality"[14] is of dubious validity - simply because, as Henderson spins in the complex, multiform, ever-changing world of the 'dangler', he has no certain idea of either internal or external reality. We have seen how external reality escapes classification by Henderson - and how his fluctuating consciousness compounds this feature. And tied in with this idea of an 'internal' reality is the third facet of Henderson's expedition.

It is difficult, just as it is with the other central characters in Bellow's fiction, to assign to Henderson a fixed and constituted 'self'. Henderson himself realises this, as he explains to Dahfu:-

> If I had the mental constitution to live inside the nutshell and think myself the king of infinite space, that would be just fine. But that's not how I am. King, I am a Becomer. Now you see your situation is different. You are a Be-er. I've just got to stop Becoming. Jesus Christ, when am I going to Be?[191]

Clearly, Henderson's inner voice crying 'I want', and his lamentations over "... the condition! Oh, my condition! First and last that condition!"[65] are tied in with this desire to escape the formlessness of his present state and graduate to an idyllic rank of stabilised Be-ing. But this longing on Henderson's part is woefully misplaced. For if he did attain to an essence of Be-ing, his striving, querulous, unruly nature - his *real grun-tu-molani*, his genuine vivifying force - would be neutralised, leaving him etiolated and burnt-out, rather like Allbee at the conclusion of *The Victim*. And would not Henderson find himself imprisoned in the state of Be-ing, just like those whom he perceives already manifest it? Willatale, the 'woman of bittahness', may have the *grun-tu-molani* but she is enslaved by impotence, passivity and helplessness. And Dahfu is in a no-win situation in this regard. His premature death is already assured by dint of the tribal custom that when the king can no longer meet the needs of his legion of wives, he must perish. But as he tells Henderson, "I too must complete Becoming"[210]. Of course, in his attempt to stop Becoming and

start Be-ing - by capturing the lion Gmilo - he dies. A few points about Dahfu: like Tamkin in *Seize the Day* he is a composite - in this case part noble savage, part civilised clown, part genius, part dilettante, a brilliant man whose brilliance "rested on doubtful underpinnings"[269]. Elements of his philosophy are thoroughly absurd and contradictory. His belief that "good exchanged for evil truly is the answer" and that "the noble will have its turn in the world"[214-15] seems hopelessly out of place amidst the savage indifference of the Wariri - and even more so when juxtaposed with Dahfu's mild acceptance of his role as leader of this people. Dahfu also extols the cathartic changing powers of the imagination:-

> Imagination, imagination, imagination! It converts to actual. It sustains, it alters, it redeems! "You see," he said, "I sit here in Africa and devote myself to this in personal fashion, to my best ability, I am convinced. What homo sapiens imagines, he may slowly convert himself to".[271]

Yet not only do the transfiguring capacities of the imagination appear severely limited by a combination of the cruel atavism of the Wariri and the deterministic force of their ancient rituals, but Dahfu can also tell Henderson "to move from the states that I myself make into the states which are of themselves"[284] - but if Henderson were to do this he would enter into a state of Be-ing - fixed, transcendent, passive and dangerously quiescent, a state which is the antithesis of the essence of the Bellow hero. Dahfu's error is to believe that there is a closure to the powers of conversion - they must continually regenerate themselves, or end in stagnation or death. And Dahfu can also speculate with Henderson:-

> Well Henderson, what are the generations for, please explain to me? Only to repeat fear and desire without a change? This cannot be what the thing is for, over and over and over. Any good man will try to break the cycle. There is no issue from that cycle for a man who do not take things into his own hands.[297]

Yet Dahfu is the last one to take things into his own hands, dying as he does in performance of the cyclic ritual with Gmilo. The reader is left to wonder whether in fact it is Henderson who has broken the cycle, at least with regard to the Wariri, by

stealing away the lion cub which is supposed to house the spirit of Dahfu, and thus vitiating the integrity of any future performances of the tribe's ceremony. Dahfu is astute enough, though, to recognise that Henderson defies all prescriptions and categories - that he will never be a Be-er:-

> You are a compound. Maybe a large amount of agony. Maybe a small touch of the Lazarus. But I cannot fully subsume you. No rubric will fully hold you. Maybe because we are friends [...] Rubrics will not do with friends.[300]

What Henderson has amply demonstrated is that his is a life of continual Becoming, his self elusive and protean. During his adventures, he finds that he cannot embrace the community of the Wariri as to do so would threaten his life. Neither can he embrace the Arnewi, as he threatens the community. But he cannot settle either on a self of amor fati *or* on a self of natural will. The "old self" which he refers to [275] will not be transmuted into a new one. For this is his permanent self - the 'dangling' self. It is clear that Henderson's articulation of this state is his most honest insight:-

> This again smote me straight on the spirit, and I had all the old difficulty, thinking of my condition. A crowd of facts came upon me with accompanying pressure on the chest. Who - who was I? A millionaire wanderer and wayfarer. A brutal and violent man driven into the world. A man who fled his own country, settled by his forefathers. A fellow whose heart said I want, I want. Who played the violin in despair, seeking the voice of angels. Who had to burst the spirit's sleep, or else [...] And the process started over again. Once more it was, Who are you? And I must confess that I didn't know where to begin.[76-77]

Robert Boyers avers that he knows of no "serious commentator who has found [the] novel's conclusion satisfactory".[15] Without wishing to cast aspersions on the seriousness of some critics myself, it must be said that many symbol-seekers have found the conclusion to be extremely rewarding. A wealth of figurative readings can be elicited from the final scenes. We have, for instance, the seeming enactment of the "three metamorphoses" from *Thus Spake Zarathustra.* We have Henderson landing in Newfoundland (say it slowly!), which ocasions Eusebio Rodrigues' bizarre, orgiastic declaration that "the unquenchable and radiant power of the human

spirit is now incarnate in Henderson and will lead both him and America to true glory."[16] We are even treated to the sight of Henderson returning on a Sunday, "just before Thanksgiving week", which one study is kind enough to inform us is a "week in November when Americans express their gratitude for their existence."[17] But the appearance of the child, in particular, in the closing chapter is so gratuitous that it is impossible to believe that Bellow intended anything other than to mock the critical associative tendency. John J.Clayton, who believes this, also realises that humanist interpretations of the kind given by M. Gilbert Porter - "This is the fully regenerate Henderson joyously celebrating the new life that he has discovered"[18] - will not wash because "we cannot believe that he [Henderson] is fundamentally different from what he was."[19] True, in a flood of over-confidence, Henderson outlines his desire to enrol at medical school under the name of Leo E. Henderson (for obvious reasons) - but later modifies his ambition with the statement that "I would never make a lion. I knew that; but I might pick up a small gain here and there in the attempt"[298]. Michael Glenday is quite right to have doubts about "the nature of Henderson's euphoria, about its origin and durability." But he errs when he claims that "At the end of the novel [...] we are faced with [this kind of] equivocatory prose at a point where we had every right to expect a clarifying perspective"[20] - for what *gives* us this right? All the evidence up to now gives the impression that Henderson will be in a state of permanent 'dangling' - and the final chapter does nothing to dispel this view, with its deeply ambiguous tone, its climate of uncertainty, vague hope and uneasy fear. Earlier Henderson had said that all that was left to him was "kindness and love"[316]. Yet he is unsure if his wife loves him, deciding that even if she only seemed to, that "was better than nothing"[329]. In similar fashion, he says of his children that "I love them very much- I think [...] We'll have to see"[335]. And whether this love can be translated into something lasting is thrown further into doubt by the evidence, in the form of his harangue of the consular officials, that his short-tempered peevishness is still very much with him[331]. Henderson's seemingly transformational proclamation - "I had a voice that said I want! I want! *I*? It should

have told me *she* wants, *he* wants, *they* want"[286] - can be seen in this uneasy and ambiguous light. There are quasi-religious overtones, almost as if Henderson is fervently awaiting the Second Coming, in his avowal of a belief in justice, *the* reason, and his further recitation of the passage from Handel [328,334]. But these indications of spiritual promise are conditional, as they jockey for position with a languorous fear of death. Moreover, Henderson's importation of the young lion cub wherein rests the soul of Dahfu (allegedly), can easily be seen as either a strong pointer of optimism *or* as a rather sad and desperate gesture. Similarly, it is difficult to say whether Henderson is now privy to a conception of the nobility of the human struggle, or whether he simply believes that he is not as badly off as he thought. I think, in both cases, there is an intermingling of both extremes. And there is even a hint, in an enigmatic passage, that Henderson has learned to reconcile himself better to the 'dangling' essence, not of his be-ing but of his becoming:-

'Oh you can't get away from rhythm, Romilayu,' I recall saying many times to him. 'You just can't get away from it. The left hand shakes with the right hand, the inhale follows the exhale, the systole talks back to the diastole, the hands play patty-cake, and the feet dance with each other. And the seasons. And the stars and all of that. And the tides and all that junk. You've got to live at peace with it because if it's going to worry you, you'll lose'.[329]

Henderson seems to be groping toward a realisation of eternal rhythm, of opposites crowding and clashing, of the central paradox that it is his changeable, formless 'dangling' nature which remains - unchanged. Fittingly, in the aethestic final scene, Henderson is in motion, fluid, mutable, dancing around the aeroplane, forever becoming, never being. And let us give in to a mischievous temptation, for it is irresistible. If it is impossible to see Henderson as a member of a new nobility, then he is at least a conditional and absurd Higher Man:-

Lift up your hearts, my brothers, high, higher! And do not forget your legs! Lift up your legs too, you fine dancers: and better still, stand on your heads.[21]

References

The epigraph is taken from Edwin Muir's poem, 'The Mythical Journey', in Muir, Edwin: *Collected Poems,* Faber and Faber, London, 1963, p63.

1 Bellow, Saul: 'A world too much with us', *Critical Inquiry* 2.1 (1975) pp1-9, (p9).

2 Bellow, Saul: 'An Interview with Myself', *New Review* 2.18, (1975) pp53-56, (p54).

3 See, for instance, Rodrigues, *Quest for the Human*, Dutton, *Saul Bellow* and Klein, 'A Discipline of Nobility'. Also note that *Henderson* is on the 'death-list' cited on page 1 of this study's introduction. For a definition of 'associative' readings see the 'notes' for the previous chapter.

4 Eusebio Rodrigues attempts to interpret *Henderson the Rain King* as a kind of 'case history' demonstrating the progress of a patient undergoing therapy by means of the soothing and liberating ideas of Wilhelm Reich. "The central premise in Reichian theory is the existence of an energy that pervades and permeates all of nature and is the active vital force in every human being" writes Rodrigues [p87]. This "cosmic orgone energy" has been repressed and distorted by the structures of society (political, economic, etc.), leading to terrible pressure in the dammed-up.individual. This force can only be released from beneath the "armour" of repression by Reichian purgatives. Thus, Rodrigues sees Henderson as "one within whose monumental self the orgone energy is dammed-up and imprisoned"[p119], and "an armoured individual in dire need of orgone therapy"[p123]. The physical encounters with such as Queen Willatale and Dahfu's lion are supposed to act as therapeutic agents. The novel itself "cleverly disguise(s) the ideas and therapeutic methods of Wilhelm Reich which pervade the novel and supply it with a structure"[p119]. Though this analysis is ingeniously contrived, it ultimately tells us more about Reich than Bellow, with the consequent obfuscation of the latter's imagination. *Some* associative readings may be of value - for instance with regard to *Moby Dick* or some of the Tales of Hawthorne - though I am inclined to agree with Bellow when he complains, with specific reference to the proliferation of interpretations of the former: "What does that do for *Moby Dick* or for me? It doesn't do anything. It only results in the making of more books - King Solomon has already warned us against that in Ecclesiastes"(Brans, Jo "Common Needs, Common Preoccupations": An interview with Saul Bellow, in *Trachtenberg*, pp57-72, p61).

5 Bellow, Saul: 'Deep Readers of the World, Beware!' *New York Times Book Review,* 15 February, 1959. For more detail see, Newman, Judie: *Saul Bellow and History,* p72.

6 Clayton: *I.D.M.* , pp169-170.

7 Lloyd Harper, Gordon: 'Saul Bellow', Interview reprinted in Rovit, *S.B.C.C.S.* pp5-18, (p13).

8 Maddocks, Melvin: 'The Search for Freedom and Salvation', *Christian science Monitor*, 1959, repinted in *Trachtenberg, C.E.S.B.* pp24-25, (p25).

9 Saul Bellow: Henderson the Rain King, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1959, *Penguin Books*, London, 1965 p4. All subsequent page references are from this edition and are cited in the text.

[10] Opdahl: *T.N.S.B.*, p118.

[11] Steers, Nina A: 'Successor to Faulkner?' *Show* 4 (September 1964) p38, cited in Opdahl, *T.N.S.B.*, p123.

[12] Hughes, Daniel: 'Reality and the Hero': *Lolita* and *Henderson the Rain King*', *Modern Fiction Studies* 6, (Winter 1960-61) reprinted in Malin, *S.B.C.* pp69-91, (p80).

[13] Wilson: *O.B.P.*, p127.

[14] Opdahl:*T.N.S.B.*, p138.

[15] Boyers, Robert: 'Nature and Social Reality in Bellow's Sammler', *Critical Quarterly,* 15 (1973) pp251-71; reprinted in *Trachtenberg, C.E.S.B.* pp122-140, (p128).

[16] Rodrigues: *Q.F.T.H.*, p156.

[17] Schraepen, Edward and Michel, Pierre: York Notes; Saul Bellow: *Henderson the Rain King,* University of Beirut, 1981, reprinted by Longman York Press, Burnt Mill, Harlow, Essex, 1981, p43.

[18] Porter: *W.T.P.*, p144.

[19] Clayton: *I.D.M.*, p185.

[20] Glenday: *S.B.D.H.*, pp84,91.

[21] Nietzsche, Friederich: *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Penguin Classics, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, translated by R.J.Hollingdale, 1969, pp304-05. I hope I shall be forgiven this brief bout of associationism - it is not too serious.

## Chapter Six

### *Herzog* - A descent into the maelstrom

"Woe to the thinker who is not the gardener
but only the soil of the plants that grow in him!"
Nietzsche, *Daybreak.*

"And if the unexplained life is not worth living,
the explained life is unbearable too."
Saul Bellow, *Herzog.*

In beginning this chapter I shall take the unusual step of agreeing with Michael Glenday's view that *Herzog* marks a perceptible shift in the focus of Bellow's art. Many critics felt there to be a radical departure from the norm in what seemed to be the overt pessimism and misanthropic conservatism of *Mr. Sammler's Planet.* I shall argue in the relevant chapter that this is not the case, that Artur Sammler is little different from his predecessors. What is certainly true is that Sammler evinces traits directly inherited from his immediate fictional forebear. Without altering the essential 'dangling' nature of the hero, what Bellow has done is twofold. First, he has heightened the consciousness and awareness of his central character to a dreadfully intense level, such that he, and every subsequent hero, become "prisoner[s] of perception [...] compulsory witness[es]"[72]. And second, without compromising the depth of characterisation (except perhaps in the cases of Albert Corde and Kenneth Trachtenberg), Bellow has shown the extrinsic world of 'reality' to be ever more chaotic and bizarre, this turbulence itself being heightened through the raised receptivity of the consciousness of the hero. In such a way, it is not *Mr. Sammler's Planet* but *Herzog* which is the first novel characterised by these modifications - though, as I say, the middle ground remains the eternal haunt of the central figures themselves.

Tony Tanner believes that "Bellow excels himself in this book by presenting not only the importance, but also the curse and the comedy of intense consciousness."[1] Herzog is, after all, the man with "the immense (the appalling!) collection of facts in his [...] head"[224]. Bellow himself has placed more emphasis on the comic aspects of the novel:-

> There are times when I enjoy making fun of the educated American. Herzog, for instance, was meant to be a comic novel.[2]

and, on another occasion:-

> My readers were oppressed by the thinking-cap and blind to the whirlwind comedy. Too bad. I am largely to blame for that.[3]

Ignoring the comedy of the novel (or relegating an awareness of such too far into the background) can certainly produce critical responses which are piercingly shrill, and often wildly inaccurate. One critic castigates Bellow for giving us "the most flattering image of the intellectual to be found in modern literature", noting, without a trace of resentment, that the novel "has brought much good cheer and glad tidings to the intellectual community, and as is so often the case, such service has not gone unrewarded."[4] Another laments "Bellow's failure to acknowledge the comic preposterousness of the kind of mental activity going on [...] a pretension that might itself characterize the hero were he not [...] indistinguishable from the author", and directs us to see Bellow's inability to appreciate "the *essential* irrelevance, the *essential* pretension and shabbiness of the self-aggrandizing mind at work in, and for, the hero."[5] Such comments, clearly, are deeply misplaced, for, even though Bellow may have been "making fun of [his] own type", the author attempted to "disinfect [Herzog] of all Bellow influences."[6] A reading of the novel will reveal that Moses E. Herzog enjoys the same relationship with his creator as do the other main figures in Bellow's

fiction - the 'ironic endorsement' which results in the 'dangling' state. This relationship is in this case refined to such an extent that it produces undoubtedly *the* most complex, *the* most contradictory, *the* most ambiguous character in the Bellow corpus. Herzog is a man at once lovable and hateful, incisive and fatuous, sophisticated and puerile, an idiotic genius and a dazzling buffoon. Yet herein lies the problem with the novel - the paradoxical portrayal is not so much laboured (as is the irony in certain parts of *The Adventures of Augie March*) but *unfocused.* Irving Howe makes what I think to be a valid point in this respect, declaring that "there are occasions when the uses of ambiguity can themselves be ambiguous, shading off into confusion or evasiveness."[7] Whether Bellow has slightly lost control of his narrative technique or whether the chaos of Herzog's consciousness is deliberately designed to elevate him to a 'hyper-dangling' state, the results are, either way, not wholly satisfactory. The view of Herzog is altogether too muzzy and blurred, for when the reader comes (as he must) to address the underlying seriousness of the novel, his concentration and patience are often dissipated in a maelstrom of anarchy. In brief, there is an ambiguity which satisfies and an ambiguity which frustrates - and *Herzog* has a tendency to lapse into the latter. It is difficult to account for this phenomenon, especially as it does not seem to be repeated to anything like the same degree in subsequent novels. Perhaps it was simply an inevitable corollary of delving into the frenzied turmoil of the mind of a Moses Herzog.

"Considering his entire life, he realized that he had mismanaged everything - everything. His life was, as the phrase goes, ruined. But since it hadn't been much to begin with, there was not much to grieve about"[3]. So reflects Herzog, recumbent amidst the ruins and decay of his dilapidated country house. A man whose character was "narcissistic [...] masochistic [...] anachronistic"[4], whose gifts have rotted away in the dissolution of uncompleted projects, failed careers and turbulent relationships,

and whose profligacy with his inheritance has left him with the wretched 'white elephant' of this ramshackle estate in the middle of nowhere, Herzog gives us a potted history of himself:-

Resuming his self-examination, he admitted that he had been a bad husband - twice. Daisy, his first wife, he had treated miserably. Madelaine, his second, had tried to do *him* in. To his son and daughter he was a loving but bad father. To his own parents he had been an ungrateful child. To his country, an indifferent citizen. To his brothers and sisters, affectionate but remote. With his friends, an egotist. With love, lazy. With brightness, dull. With power, passive. With his own soul, evasive [...] But how charming we remain, notwithstanding.[4-5]

Since all of these events and traits are indubitably true, the reader is liable to be impressed by the candour and rigour of Herzog's musings. But the characteristically self-satisfied conclusion to these musings highlights the fact that Herzog is not quite so honest with himself as he might believe. For instance, Herzog has been made a cuckold by Madelaine - but he fails to confront the implicit logic of his affair with his Polish mistress Wanda, in that *he* would have become a cuckolder had she not refused to break her marriage. And it takes Herzog's Aunt Zelda to point out something which Herzog had conveniently suppressed in his mind:-

"You've been reckless about women."
"Since Madelaine threw me out, maybe. Trying to get back my self-respect."
"No, while you were still married." Zelda's mouth tightened.
Herzog felt himself redden. A thick, hot pressure filled his chest. His heart felt ill and his forehead instantly wet. He muttered, "She made it tough for me too. Sexually".[38-39]

Herzog's earlier admission that he had been a bad husband clearly has more to do with a sense of wounded self-pity than with a confession of adultery. Indeed, the number and frequency of Herzog's dalliances with the opposite sex makes his indignation at being left "wearing the horns" by Madelaine and Gersbach a trifle ludicrous. And if Gersbach shows scant regard for Herzog in stealing the latter's wife, then Herzog has

little more time for the emotional wreck Hoberly, the spurned lover of Herzog's latest mistress Ramona, viewing him as a case study to be assigned to a theoretical compartment: "It's possible that a man like Hoberly by falling apart intends to bear witness to the failure of individual existence. He proves it can't work"[208]. In short, the attraction of this feeling intellectual to "dirty ways" and "lewd knowledge"[247] is a bit too all-consuming for comfort:- "He might look down his conscious nose at sensual delight, but [...] No amount of sublimation could replace that erotic happiness, that knowledge"[185-186]. And what of Madelaine, that grotesque, neurotic, hysterically distracted creature - at least as she is described by Herzog? Is it perhaps significant that only Herzog's mistresses agree with his view of her as a bitch from hell - they would, wouldn't they? - and is Herzog engaged in some sickly form of self-justification?

Viewed by other people, Herzog is a foolish Innocent, a babe in the ways of the world, a hopelessly incongruous twentieth-century 'Man of Feeling'. Moses is a "stumbling, ingenuous burlap [...] a heart without guile, in need of protection"[307], "infected by the Old World with feelings like Love - Filial Emotion. Old stuporous dreams"[281], who takes refuge in "childish jingles and Mother Goose"[77]. And this is undoubtedly true to some extent, and is shown in action on several occasions (particularly in the hilarious exchange between Herzog and the deformed and brutal lawyer, Himmelstein). Indeed, Herzog becomes a comic figure *because* of his naivety. Again, however, this artlessness is not all that it seems. There is a suspicion that Herzog actively promotes this view of himself, in order to differentiate himself from the "Reality Instructors. [Those who] want to teach you - to punish you - with the lessons of the real"[125]. By doing so, Herzog can appear foolish - but superior, ingenuous - but true. In a curious and self-supporting way his guilelessness becomes a badge of honour for him. And it can easily deflect attention (not least his own) from

foibles which suggest that he is not quite so pure and unadorned. For, like Joseph, he is given to bouts of spleen and bitchiness, as in this attack on an old schoolfellow:-

I knew him at school, we played ping-pong at the Reynolds Club. He had a white buttocky face with a few moles, and fat, curling thumbs that put a cheating spin on the ball [...] I don't believe his I.Q. was so terribly high .... [51]

The resentment of the marginalised intellectual is also evident in this assault upon a man who now wields great 'public' influence. Like Leventhal, he is often paranoid, as evidenced in his suspicions about the motives of Himmelstein's spouse when she and Herzog are discussing Madelaine[82], or in his morbid fear of being trapped into marriage by Ramona (Herzog could conceivably fit into most - though not all - of the categories that go to make up the 'paranoid personality'[77]). Like Henderson, he is prone to violent fantasies, speculating as to how Madelaine would react "if he had knocked her down, clutched her hair, dragged her screaming and fighting round the room, flogged her until her buttocks bled"[10]. And like Wilhelm, Herzog is fatalistically drawn to potential dangers: there is a "flavour of subjugation" in his love for Madelaine[8]; he is "flattered" by the affections of a man with underworld connections[35]; and he sums up this propensity in his own Shelleyesque reflection:-

I fall upon the thorns of life, I bleed. And then? I fall upon the thorns of life, I bleed. And what next? I get laid, I take a short holiday, but very soon after I fall upon those same thorns with gratification in pain, or suffering in joy - who knows what the mixture is![206-207]

The foregoing characteristics establish the basic duality of Herzog's actions. But since Herzog's life is overwhelmingly mental, it is in this realm that we encounter the truest picture of Herzog - the bizarre and disordered inferno of his thoughts.

What accounts for this chaos is the crushing weight of Herzog's "need to explain, to have it out, to justify, to put in perspective, to clarify, to make amends"[2]. This need

is like a virus, infecting every part of Herzog's consciousness. Yet the problem is that although this compulsion to clarify is intended to act as a purgative, a path through confusion to some sort of harmony, in practice it merely defines the disarray. Herzog is unable to resolve the problems which beset his vulnerable perception, because although he "practiced the art of circling among random facts to swoop down on essentials [...] nothing of the sort happened"[10]. Bellow has commented that Herzog "needs to dismiss a great mass of irrelevancy and nonsense in order to survive."[8] Perhaps he does - but he is also the *purveyor* of a great deal of irrelevancy and nonsense, his mind a farrago of inchoate and peripheral 'concerns'. Without any shadow of doubt Bellow intended that Herzog be this way. But the problem lies in the notion of 'dismissal'. A superficial reading of the novel's conclusion might support the view that Herzog has rid himself of the intolerable burden of hyper-consciousness. But the author himself admits that this is not the case:-

> ... he's [Herzog] come to a point of rest, which is saying a lot for anybody these days [...but...] he's going to have to assume roles again, and deal with people again. He's just come to a well-earned interregnum. Don't grudge poor Moses *that*.[9]

In fairness, the reader is only too delighted that Moses has come to a rest. But if we are to assume that Herzog's mass of tangential absurdities are to return, and that he will continue to dangle in this mental imbroglio, then not only are the 'humanist' and 'anti-humanist' positions undermined (dependent as they are on lasting progress or terminal decline), but the survival of Herzog's sanity is also in jeopardy. And although he claims that, "if I am out of my mind, it's all right with me"[1], [315], this claim is made during his temporary period of rest - when he is inevitably plunged back into the maelstrom, the experience might prove too much for him (although, as always with the Bellow hero, suffering is alternated with vitality in the dangling area). But it must be owned that the contradictions of the Herzog view can quickly become overpowering.

Just as did Henderson in *Henderson the Rain King*, so Herzog seems to have a problem defining exactly what constitutes 'reality'. Surrounded as he is by the corrupting influence of 'Reality Instructors', Herzog nevertheless maintains a deep-seated hope that what he sees as the innate dignity of Man can find expression in the modern world. In this most unaccommodating and brutal of centuries, and up against a formidable recent history of intellectual and technological opposition to his wish, Herzog's faith can appear to be mere wilful overcompensation for the prevailing view of those who, like Himmelstein, claim "facts are nasty"[86] and that the creed of the contemporary age, in a distortion of Nietzsche's dictum, must be "Death is God"[290]. Whether Moses' view is indeed an incongruous bequest gleaned from his studies of Romanticism, he still fights against equating 'realism' with 'cruelty':-

> Are all the traditions used up, the beliefs done for, the consciousness of the masses not yet ready for the next development? Is this the full crisis of dissolution? Has the filthy moment come when moral feeling dies, conscience disintegrates, and respect for liberty, law, public decency, all the rest, collapses in cowardice, decadence, blood? [...] The canned sauerkraut of Spengler's "Prussian Socialism", the commonplaces of the Wasteland outlook, the cheap mental stimulants of Alienation, the cant and rant of pipsqueaks about Inauthenticity and Forlorness. I can't accept this foolish dreariness. We are talking about the whole life of Mankind. The subject is too great, too deep for such weakness, cowardice ... [74-75]

And, in another of his 'mental letters', he lambasts the apocalyptic view of those who wallow in trendy despair:-

> We must get it out of our heads that this is a doomed time, that we are waiting for the end, and the rest of it, mere junk from fashionable magazines [...] the advocacy and praise of suffering take us in the wrong direction and those of us who remain loyal to civilisation must not go for it [...] More commonly suffering breaks people, crushes them, and is simply unilluminating. You see how gruesomely human beings are destroyed by pain, when they have the added torment of losing their humanity first, so that their death is a total defeat. ... [316-317]

There is no reason to doubt the basic sincerity of Herzog's view. However, the circumstances of his immediate 'reality' tend to qualify this belief, since more often than not they prove to be uncomfortable and even hostile. His failed first marriage, his second which ends in divorce and betrayal, his estrangement from his children, the duplicity of his best 'friend' Gersbach (indeed, throughout the novel Herzog never seems to be really intimate with anyone, not even his brother Will, or the eccentric scientist Asphalter), his failed career - these events combine to turn Moses into the suffering clown that he is. Moreover, Herzog reveals in a nightmarish memory that he has been molested and sexually abused as a child - would this experience not have coloured his view of 'reality'? This is especially relevant when we witness his reactions when reality again proves bestial, in the case of the child murder, the details of which Herzog overhears in a courtroom. Herzog is "wrung, and wrung again, and wrung again, again"[240] at the supposed realisation that this brutal strain of reality exists - yet he surely could not have blinded himself to it in the light of his childhood horror. Additionally, Herzog is sometimes guilty of the same intellectual tendencies as the Spenglers of history, assigning complex individuals to compartments, turning them into mere representatives of the direction of historical and cultural forces. There is no better example of this tendency than Herzog's view of Gersbach, whom he pictures as a protean 'mass-man', a ludicrous artist-politician, a "poet in mass communications"[215]. As Herzog discovers when he sees Gersbach tenderly bathing the former's daughter, such generalisations lead directly to inhuman actions. Herzog's ambivalence is crystallised when he upbraids a 'friend' for constructing "a merely aesthetic critique of modern history! After the wars and mass killings!"[75] - yet later chides himself for failing fully to comprehend such slaughter:-

> *You fool*! Look at these millions of dead. Can you pity them, feel for them? You can nothing! There were too many. We burned them to ashes, we buried them with bulldozers. History is the history of cruelty, not love, as soft men think.[290]

With some irony, Herzog realises that he, too, is a Reality Instructor, "a very special sort of lunatic [who] expects to inculcate his principles"[125] - but it seems that neither he nor we are ever sure just what his reality is.

The suspicion that Herzog is rather proud of his 'Holy Fool' status has already been noted. Implicit in the distinction between Moses and those Reality Instructors who *are* sure of their principles is the emotional belief of the former and the cold, often savage logic of the latter. But again, Herzog seems to occupy the no-man's land between the two poles of Faith and Reason rather than being an unalloyed representative of one or the other. For Herzog *does* have confidence in the power of rationality - "Reason exists! Reason ..."[165] -is well aware of the strides forward that man has made through this faculty, and indeed manifests the potentially transformational qualities of the mind in many of his discourses ('potentially', since none of his mental letters are ever mailed). Yet the modern desire to understand and explain absolutely everything in terms of pristine and objective reason leaves Herzog with a bad case of 'rationality fatigue'. His bouts of hyper-reasoning, the crazy excess of information in his ever-burgeoning consciousness - these lead to utter chaos, a chaos which can only be relieved by mental breakdown or a flight into the emotions, away from "the unbearable intensity of these ideas"[290]. In the affective domain, memory and faith come together with emotion and we see the soul (that Bellovian word), the distilled essence of Moses E. Herzog. Much as it is for the other Bellow heroes, Herzog's view is that life is "unexpected intrusions of beauty"[218]. In this case, it is the uniquely personal memories of Herzog which define his existence, for although these are occasionally unpleasant (the death of his mother or the sexual attack upon him), they possess a languid sweetness which means infinitely more to Moses than the incessant babble which assaults his conscious mind. Additionally, during such beautiful intervals,

Herzog often experiences overt and explicit visions of God, far more open than any of his fictional predecessors:-

In the mild afternoon, later, at the waterside in Woods Hole, waiting for the ferry, he looked through the green darkness at the net of bright reflections on the bottom. He loved to think about the power of the sun, about light, about the ocean. The purity of the air moved him. There was no stain in the water, where schools of minnows swam. Herzog sighed and said to himself, 'Praise God - praise God'.[91]

Commenting on *Herzog*, Bellow describes what takes place during these transient periods of peace:-

In the greatest confusion there is still an open channel to the soul. It may be difficult to find because by midlife it is overgrown, and some of the wildest thickets that surround it grow out of what we describe as our education. But the channel is always there, and it is our business to keep it open, to have access to the deepest part of ourselves [...] The soul has to find and hold its ground against hostile forces, sometimes embodied in ideas which frequently deny its very existence, and which indeed often seem to be trying to annul it altogether.[10]

The problem for Herzog is that not only is this channel blocked for most of the time, but it is the very contradictions in his emotional realm which *cause* the obstruction. We already know that Herzog's emotional 'reality', in the shape of Madelaine, Gersbach etc, is a wreckage. On top of this, Moses often sneers at his emotions when they take the form of what he contemptuously refers to as 'potato love' - "Amorphous, swelling, hungry, indiscriminate, cowardly potato love"[91] - as they all too regularly do. He himself is not altogether free from a scorn for the supposed 'weakness' of feeling. Most pertinently, when confronted by the appalling reality of the child murder, Herzog finds that his emotional reactions render him utterly impotent:-

He pressed himself with intensity, but 'all his might' could get nothing for the buried boy. Having experienced nothing but his own *human feelings*, in which he found nothing of use. What if he felt moved to cry? Or pray? He pressed hand to hand. And what did he feel? Why he felt himself - his own trembling hands, and eyes that stung. And what was there in modern post, ... post-Christian America to pray for?

Justice - justice and mercy? And pray away the monstrousness of life, the wicked dream it was?[240]

And what of Herzog's faith, in the face of such shocking brutality? Bellow, in examining the central character in a review of another novel, explains why he finds the book disappointing:-

A man might well be meek in his own interests, but furious at such abuses of the soul and eager to show what is positive and powerful in his faith. The lack of such power makes faith itself shadowy, more like obscure tenacity than spiritual conviction.[11]

In the light of an often hostile reality, and a vacillating and anomalous nature, it does not take a great leap of imagination to envisage that the foregoing passage might have been written about Moses E. Herzog. Is he not guilty of - "obscure tenacity"? Perhaps - but he should not be blamed too greatly for that, for such obscure tenacity is Herzog's most valuable commodity. What is certain is that Herzog's ideal of living in the "inspired condition, to know truth, to be free, to love another, to consummate existence," to achieve a synthesis of "belief based on reason"[165] remains an obscure and distant one. "What this country needs," jokes Herzog, "is a good five cent synthesis"[207]. He could certainly do with one himself.

Perhaps the most ambiguous feature of the novel is the relationship between Herzog's views of 'self' and 'brotherhood'. This is a particularly difficult relationship to establish, since not only do these two notions tend intrinsically to vie with one another, but Herzog's ideas of both are exceptionally confused and confusing. The first problem lies in trying to decipher what Herzog's self actually *is*. R.R.Dutton points out that "his [Herzog's] trouble lies in a lack of self-definition."[12] True enough - for Herzog frequently appears to be composed of *other* selves, "people in public life [...] friends [...] relatives [...] the dead [...] his own obscure dead, and finally the famous

dead"[1]. Herzog's fear that "the private sphere" is being invaded[163], and his boast that "a man like me has shown the arbitrary withdrawal of proud subjectivity from the collective and historical progress of mankind"[307], seem bizarre statements to make when one considers that, in the first place, his consciousness is one of the most 'invaded' there is, and, in the second place, his mind seems to be the playground for the theories and speculations of philosophers, historians and politicians. That self, Moses E.Herzog, becomes embroiled in the turmoil of discourse, as our hero mixes an anachronistic Romanticised over-valuation of the individual with the universal concepts (science, technology, economics, history of mankind, grand-scale philosophy) which, in however debased or ill-apprehended a form, have shaped human life in the mass. The second difficulty lies in pinpointing just what is Moses' *attitude* to the self. Herzog's most significant history, as we have seen, is his *personal* one, and he appears to be a staunch defender of the value of the self, insisting that "the strength of a man's virtue or spiritual capacity [be] measured by his ordinary life"[106]; that, with Emerson, "the private life of one man shall be a more illustrious monarchy [...] than any kingdom in history"[160]; and indeed that "the revolutions of the twentieth century, the liberation of the masses by production, created private life but gave nothing to fill it with. This was where he came in. The progress of civilisation - indeed, the survival of civilisation - depended on the success of Moses E.Herzog"[125]. In short, Herzog claims to have his finger in the dyke as the waters of self-obliteration threaten to burst out:-

> This little demon was impregnated with modern ideas, and one in particular excited his terrible little heart: you must sacrifice your poor, squawking, niggardly individuality - which may be nothing anyway (from an analytic viewpoint) but a persistent infantile megalomania, or (from a Marxian point of view) a stinking little bourgeois property - to historical necessity [...] But of course he, Herzog, predictably bucking such trends, had characteristically [...] tried to be a *marvelous* Herzog.[93]

Though this last sentence is not without irony, it seems there can be no gainsaying Herzog's intentions. Or can there? Bellow, again commenting on *Herzog*, says:-

> Many people feel a 'private life' to be an affliction. In some sense it is a genuine affliction; it cuts one off from a common life. To me, a significant theme of *Herzog* is the imprisonment of the individual in a shameful and impotent privacy. He feels humiliated by it; he struggles comically with it; and he comes to realise at last that what he considered his intellectual 'privilege' has proved to be another form of bondage.[13]

Herzog becomes that most curious of creatures, the self-despising egotist. For he is just as much disposed to attack the self as to defend it. Herzog is the man who "did not care for his own personality"[12] (despite wallowing in a memory of sexual self-satisfaction only moments later[13]); who fears that "self-development" and "self-realization" are "titles under which [...] lunacies occurred"[66]; who suspects that death is to be preferred to"the torment and boredom of an incorrigible character"[182]; and who concludes, not without some measure of regret, that "Oneself is simply grotesque"[219] and that "personal life is a humiliation and to be an individual contemptible"[264]. Not only, then, are Moses' attitudes to the self contradictory, but if this, second, deprecatory, attitude toward the uniqueness of the individual is, as Bellow seems to imply, to be translated into a desire for community, a deliverance from the bondage of private life into a sense of brotherhood, then such a passage, already fraught with anomalies, becomes even more difficult, thanks to Herzog's intrinsically ambivalent responses to fraternity. True, his longing for a place in a human fellowship is explicitly stated on several occasions. "Fighting his sadness over this solitary life"[24], Herzog is aware of "the loathsomeness of a *particular* existence" and that "the *whole* was required to redeem every separate spirit"[156]. And Herzog invites his 'faith' to assist in the expression of this longing:-

> I really believe that brotherhood is what makes a man human. If I owe God a human life, this is where I fall down. 'Man liveth not by self alone but in his brother's face

[...] Each shall behold the Eternal Father and love and joy abound.' When the preachers of dread tell you that others only distract you from metaphysical freedom then you must turn away from them. The real and essential question is one of our employment by other human beings and their employment by us.[272]

Yet Herzog is uncomfortably conscious of the down side of the equation:-

Innumerable millions of passengers had polished the wood of the turnstile with their hips. From this arose a feeling of communion - brotherhood in one of its cheapest forms [...] The more individuals are destroyed (by processes such as I know) the worse their yearning for collectivity. Worse, because they return to the mass agitated, made fervent by their failure. Not as brethren but as degenerates.[176]

There is a lingering suspicion that if Herzog rejects existentialist prescriptions about 'other people', then what he seeks is not true community, but the anonymity of submergence in the crazy crowd - that he desires not linkage of selves, but burial of his own troubled self. Moreover, his fitful 'intellectual' prejudice against the 'mass man' embodied by Valentine Gersbach - which gives rise to horrendous visions of "mobs breaking into the palaces and churches and sacking Versailles, wallowing in cream desserts, or pouring wine over their dicks and dressing in purple velvet, snatching crowns and miters and crosses ..."[215] - is always lurking dangerously in the background. And it is perhaps significant that Herzog's *magnum opus,* which would show "how life could be lived by renewing universal connections; overturning the last of the Romantic errors about the uniqueness of the self"[39], has been aborted. In any case, his ability to 'commune' with his fellow creatures must be in grave doubt, since relations are inevitably botched on the material plane, and none of his mental letters are ever sent. Herzog's most vibrant and at the same time threatening community of souls - is in his head.

The conclusion of the novel settles none of the discord in either Herzog's or the reader's mind. Since the events of the book are conducted through the medium of Moses' memory, the earliest and finishing sections overlap, allowing Herzog to steal a

march on the reader by declaring that he now feels, 'confident, cheerful, clairvoyant and strong"[1]. Yet Bellow has already mentioned that any peaceful 'state of grace' which Herzog might obtain is merely an interregnum, a hiatus. Herzog himself knows this to be the case:-

> The bitter cup would come round again, by and by. This rest and well-being were only a momentary difference in the strange lining or variable silk between life and the void.[326]

Moreover, all of the inconsistencies which Herzog's mind has thrown up are still present. Herzog re-affirms his intention "to share with other human beings as far as possible"[322], rejecting his one-time "plan for solitary self-sufficiency"[310-311] - yet does this while sitting alone in the wreckage of his country house. Amidst the apparent tranquility and radiance of his posture, Herzog can still find reason for a splenetic outburst against a Navy psychiatrist who once examined him[324]. He tells his brother Will that he does not "contemplate putting myself in the hands of Ramona or any woman, at this time"[336] - before inviting Ramona to dinner, then lazily meditating while the cleaning woman clears up his mess. Herzog in fact seems to end up in an anomalous state of *solitary dependency*, shuttling between self-absorption (such as that can be!) and a reliance *on*, not a concord *with* others (Will, Ramona etc.). Michael Glenday believes that Herzog achieves "self-knowledge" in a withdrawal from an "implacable and hostile reality"[14] (and thus Moses becomes the first real hero of the anti-humanist critics). But it is difficult to define accurately the self-knowledge of a man whose conception of self is in basic and thoroughgoing confusion, whose withdrawal is but temporary, and who is so susceptible to influences (be they physical-emotional, philosophical or historical) that he is open to the suspicion that when he is even briefly bereft of these influences - "At this time he had no messages for anyone. Nothing. Not a single word"[341] - the essential amorphous nothingness of his 'self' will be amplified. Such problems, allied to the cyclic nature of Herzog's relations with

'reality', also cast doubt upon the opposing interpretation, in which Herzog "has arrived, stripped of illusion, free and self-aware",[15] brought "by Grace [...] into a new domain of the spirit, where it is good to be",[16] into "a celebration of the human species and the transcendent self".[17] Clayton, again the best of the 'humanist' critics, says of the conclusion that "Herzog is a man communing with God and nature, not with men [...] essentially he is still alone"; realizes that Moses' 'transformation' "seems likely to be temporary and restricted to Herzog while he is alone"; but ends by declaring that he sees herein "a new kind of intellectuality, a new kind of humanist philosophy [...] a rich and profound statement of man's significance."[18] I cannot agree that Herzog, spinning alone in his essentially unchanged consciousness, should be made standard-bearer for a "new kind of humanism". However, when Clayton points to Herzog's "communing with God", he identifies the feature which will make it more and more difficult to style Bellow's central figures as 'humanists'. For even if Moses' spiritual insight is transitory (as it is) or the product of a desperate longing (as it may well be), the fact remains that the hero is driven to seek a mystical apprehension as a release-valve, an outlet to evade the problems and turmoil of - the human. The religious overtones of the closing scenes make Herzog reminiscent in many ways of Schlossberg in *The Victim*, Moses desiring a "mild or moderate truthfulness"[316], and his transient joy in a deistic *amor fati* being, if anything, a devout hyper-extension of the philosophy of Asa's acquaintance:-

> This strange organisation, I know it will die. And inside - something, something, happiness [...] 'Thou movest me.' That leaves no choice. Something produces intensity, a holy feeling as oranges produce orange, as grass green, as birds heat [...] But I have no arguments to make about it. 'Thou movest me.' 'But what do you want, Herzog?' But that's just it - not a solitary thing. I am pretty well satisfied to be, to be just as it is willed, and for as long as I may remain in occupancy.[340]

Herzog's *amor fati* is as disingenuous as that of Augie, however, since not only is it destined to be short-lived, but it can easily degenerate into the passive acceptance, the

'leave me in peace' type of attitude manifested by his brother Will. But if Herzog occupies a static and inert area at the moment, he must presently return to the vibrancy and tempestuousness of the 'dangling' state - a fact which he seems to recognize - "Myself is thus and so, and will continue thus and so. And why fight it? My balance comes from instability. Not organisation ..."[330]. Typically, though, Herzog undermines any reconciliation with himself by the demonstrably false declaration that he is "much better now at ambiguities"[304]. The end fits the man. As Dostoyevsky said of his Underground hero: "He could not help going on. But to us too it seems that this will be a good place to stop..."[19]

References
The epigraphs are, respectively:-

Nietzsche, Friedrich: *Daybreak*, Cambridge University Press, 1982, p171, No.382.

Bellow, Saul: *Herzog*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, 1965, p322. All subsequent page references are from this edition and are cited in the main body of the text

1 Tanner: *Saul Bellow*, p.88

2 Bellow, Saul: 'Foreword' to *The Closing of the American Mind* by Allan Bloom, Simon and Scguster, New York, 1987, p.15. Original essay entitled 'The Civilised Barbarian Reader'.

3 Roudané, Matthew C.: 'Interview with Saul Bellow', *Contemporary Literature* 25.3 (1984) p.269.

4 Aldridge, John W.:'The Complacency of Herzog' in *Time to Murder and Create;* reprinted in Malin, *S.B.C.* pp.209,210.

5 Poirier, Richard: 'Herzog, or, Bellow in Trouble'; Revision of the author's essay, 'Bellows to Herzog', *Partisan Review* Spring 1965, reprinted in *Rovit, S.B.C.C.S.* pp. 87,88.

6 Robinson, Robert: 'Saul Bellow at 60 - talking to Robert Robinson' *The Listener*, 13 February, 1975 p.218.

7 Howe, Irving: 'Odysseus, Flat on his Back'; *New Republic*, September 1964; reprinted in Trachtenberg, *C.E.S.B.* p.32.

8 Lloyd Harper interview in Rovit, *S.B.C.C.S.*, pp5-8, (p.17).

9 Brans, Jo: 'Common Needs, Common Preoccupations: An Interview with Saul Bellow', *Southwest Review*, 62 (1977), reprinted in Trachtenberg, *C.E.S.B.* pp57-72 (p.71).

10 Bellow, Saul: 'Foreword' to Bloom, *Closing of the American Mind* pp. 16-17.

11 Bellow, Saul: 'Recent American Fiction' *Encounter*, November 1963, p.25. Bellow is here reviewing J.F.Powers' *Morte D'Urban.*

12 Dutton: *S.B.*, p.124.

13 Lloyd Harper interview in Rovit, *S.B.C.C.S*, p.16.

14 Glenday: *S.B.D.M.*, p.107

15 Axthelm, Peter M.: *The Modern Confessional Novel*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1967, p.176.

16 Scott, Nathan A.: *Three American Moralists: Mailer, Bellow, Trilling*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame and London, 1973, p.134.

17 Opdahl: *T.N.S.B.*, p.165.

18 Clayton: *I.D.M.*, pp.227,229.

19 Dostoyevsky, Fyodor: *Notes from Underground* p.123.

## Chapter Seven

### *Mr.Sammler's Planet* - Old World, New World, No World

"Pity the planet, all joy gone
from this sweet volcanic cone;
...until the end of time
...a ghost
orbiting forever lost
in our monotonous sublime."

Robert Lowell, 'Waking Early Sunday Morning'.

"Madness is something rare in individuals - but in
groups, parties, peoples, ages it is the rule."

Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil.*

An alienated, cantankerous and desiccated old man bringing down choleric and resentful imprecations upon the (literally!) unwashed multitudes. So flowed the general tide of criticism against Mr.Artur Sammler, holocaust survivor and erstwhile accolyte of H.G.Wells, as at home amidst what he perceives to be the nightmarish and insistent chaos of modern-day Manhattan as an Eloi invited to a Morlocks' dinner party. Yet such criticism was easily transposed onto Bellow himself, for whom the old Polish Jew seemed an authentic spokesman. With the benefit of hindsight, it is easy to laugh at John Clayton's previously cited[1] likening of the author to Messrs Agnew and Wallace, two figures whose influence as forces of putative reaction has proved to have been vastly overestimated. But at the time of publication of this, Bellow's seventh novel (1970), such a response was perhaps understandable - for *Mr.Sammler's Planet* dealt a severe blow to Bellow's humanist critics. True, these critics ought to have seen the seeds of their despair in *Herzog* (as was mentioned in the foregoing chapter) - perhaps the diffusive and unfocused rendering of Moses allowed the suppression of such a recognition.[2] But the more tightly structured world of Mr.Sammler seemed to leave little room for doubt in their minds that the author was guilty of a terrible act of apostasy, losing his nerve

and selling his literary soul to the powers of an obdurate and cynically reactionary conservativism. Of course, the premise for such a sell-out - namely that Bellow had been an unalloyed spokesman for the inevitability of a 'humanistic' breakthrough - was entirely lacking in the first place. Nevertheless, Benjamin De Mott, speculating that Bellow "may have been pushed into intolerance by the cliche-mongering protestors rumoured to have told him at a White House party that 'having made you, we can break you'", goes on to accuse the author of an "over-rigid, over-familiar 'decline of culture' set of mind" and complains that "the root of the book's trouble, both as argument and as art, is a defect of sympathy".[3] David Galloway claims that the novel "ultimately shows the bankruptcy of Bellow's novelistic imagination", and senses "something Sammleresque" in the author - "a contentment with the ways of the past, a dis-ease with the present, an avuncular superiority over unwashed radicalism".[4] Similarly, M.Gilbert Porter, lamenting the 'essayistic' form of the book, informs us that "one's intellectual faculties and critical sensibilities find themselves responding more to an essay than to a novel, more to actual objectives than to virtual objects", concluding that because "it is a novel by Saul Bellow that occasions such responses [it] is a matter of not a little disappointment".[5] Eusebio Rodrigues desperately tries to salvage something from the humanistic wreckage by developing a sudden and profound awareness of the use of irony in Bellow's work, cautioning us that Sammler is "not a mere mouthpiece [...] for Bellow's attitudes and opinions", and that the reader has to be "alert at all times to the ironic and non-Sammlerian points of view"[6] - statements which are true enough in themselves, but which one suspects have only gained full credence in the mind of this critic because to deny them in the context of this novel would make a nonsense of his humanistic interpretations of Bellow's work.

But really, all this critical consternation is unnecessary, for Rodrigues is essentially correct in this instance - Sammler, like all the other Bellow heroes, is no parrot for the circumscribed Bellovian view. The outside world, and the hero's reactions to it, may have soured (although one thinks of some of the fearful responses to external chaos of Joseph, Leventhal, Tommy, and particularly Herzog) but the subtlety of Bellow's art remains, ensuring that Sammler takes his place among the perpetually dangling. Alfred Kazin makes the error of conflating author and character, accusing Bellow/Sammler of setting an agenda of "punitive moral outrage", and claiming that "the unsatisfactory thing about Mr.Sammler is that he is always right while most other people are usually wrong - sinfully so. Artur Sammler is right and has to be right all the time."[7] And, since it suits their purposes, critics who oppose the humanist point of view *per se*, like Michael Glenday, see little room for irony in Sammler's construction.[8] Yet not only can these views be shown to be misguided, it further seems to me that Sammler's language manifests not "rage and intolerance"[9] (surely it is the likes of the simian student who berates Sammler during a lecture who evince such traits) but rather a profound and heartfelt sadness, a desperate sympathy - "Mr.Sammler, sorry for all and sore at heart"[10] - and indeed, a pitiful awareness of the mad comedy of the distortions of the soul, vexed and harassed by the aching pressures of modern urban life. The one-eyed Mr.Sammler is by no means a Wellsian king in the country of the blind - but he is not the Puritanical zealot many critics believe him to be. As for Bellow himself, in answer to a question about the novel which he seems astonished should have been asked at all, he comments wearily, resignedly: "Of course it was misread..."[11]

Artur Sammler is a man back from the dead. Buried under a pile of bodies, including that of his wife, which have been pitched into a mass grave during the horrors of World War Two, and blinded in one eye by the butt of a Nazi rifle,

Sammler crawls from his hideous charnel prison to eke out a survival as a partisan, virtually a scavenging animal, in the Zamosht forest in Poland. Rescued from an internment camp by his nephew, Elya Gruner, Sammler has maintained a materially comfortable existence in the intervening twenty five years between the war's end and the period in which the novel is set, thanks to the largesse of his relative. But now, in New York at the start of the Seventies, Sammler is anything but *spiritually* comfortable amidst the overwhelming restlessness and gruesome stimulation of a world seemingly out of control. Not so much a Lazarus as a Nosferatu - one of the undead - Sammler is riven between a terrible anxiety over the direction of the Life of Man, and his own personal horror of the death he once fortuitously evaded. A man displaced, out of his time not only in his feeling that he should not, by all rights, even be there, but also in his conviction that he represents altogether another age, another standard, conveyed after his comical encounter with the imbecilic 'radicalism' of the scatalogical student:-

> He was not sorry to have met the facts, however saddening, regrettable the facts. But the effect was that Mr.Sammler did feel somewhat separated from the rest of his species, if not in some fashion severed - severed not so much by age as by preoccupations too different and remote, disproportionate on the side of the spiritual, Platonic, Augustinian, thirteenth-century.[43]

Sammler reads "the wrong books, the wrong papers"[3], particularly those of the German religious mystic Meister Eckhart, feels that the "place of honor"[73] was outside this time, and, in making a vain appeal to the assembled crowd to break up the struggle between Feffer and the black pickpocket, Sammler experiences a dreadful epiphany of isolation:-

> 'Some of you,' Sammler ordered. 'Here! Help him. Break this up.' But of course 'some of you' did not exist. No one would do anything, and suddenly Sammler felt extremely foreign - voice, accent, syntax, manner, face, mind, everything, foreign.[287]

The chaos of the modern world threatens to engulf him - in its character randomly violent, grubbily materialistic, risibly exotic and saturated with a lascivious and menacing bestiality - at least as Sammler often sees it. This disorder is represented in microcosm in Sammler's immediate group of relatives and acquaintances. There is some justification in Porter's criticism that "with the exception of Mr.Sammler, the characters seem merely walk-on functionaries, as though they are bearing signs declaring their thematic significance"[12] - but since their comic purpose is never in doubt, this is not a serious flaw (and in any case there is a substantial degree of pathos underlying the comedy). So it is that we encounter the turbulent intellectual entrepreneur, Feffer, who buzzes with a feeling of information glamour; the "high IQ moron" Wallace[177], whose grotesque desire to do everything, to experience everything, makes him the prime exemplar of the modern spirit overcharged with unrest, where supposed vitality masks a hideous nihilism; Sammler's own daughter, Shula/Slawa, cruelly fixated on her father's long-abandoned memoir of H.G.Wells; the theory junkie, Margotte, who bores Sammler with her interminable 'explanations'; the "smiling gloomy maniac" Eisen[155], purveyor of a psychotic and deadly 'artistic creativity'; and Bruch and Angela, whose immersion in the "sexual madness" which was "overwhelming the Western World"[66] is given comic focus in the former's compulsion to masturbate at the sight of hairy female arms in the subway, and in the latter's propensity to administer fellatio to holiday acquaintances. Bearing in mind that the Raskolnikovian pickpocket also exposes himself to Sammler as a sign of his power, vitality - and *relevance* - Sammler seems hopelessly enmeshed in licentious anarchy, seeing that:-

> ...the privileges of aristocracy (without any duties) [were] spread wide, especially the libidinous privileges, the right to be uninhibited, spontaneous, urinating, defacating, belching, coupling in all positions, tripling, quadrupling, polymorphous, noble in being natural, primitive, combining the leisure and luxurious inventiveness of Versailles with the hibiscus-covered erotic ease of Samoa.[33]

Surrounded by those who are "communicating chaos"[67], be that chaos physical or intellectual, political or personal, Sammler's "earth-departure objectivity"[134] cries out for an exit from this intolerable pressure. Thus it appears that he is ready to embrace the speculative proposal of Dr.Lal that the Moon be colonised by Man, that it is time "to blow this great white, blue, green planet or to be blown from it"[51]. Fearing that "this earth was a grave"[182], Sammler senses in the purely biological and materially driven argument of Lal the possibility of spiritual replenishment, a new beginning for the human race in a potentially higher 'transcendent' state. Sammler is not so much concerned with the actual physical transfer of Mankind to the Moon, but rather with the untouched and unmarred satellite (unspoiled at least by humankind) as a symbol for breaking the barriers *of* the pressurising physical.

Yet such a longing is set against the fact that Sammler seems as much a part of this crazy earth as any of the mad characters he encounters - and he shares many of their foibles. For instance, though Sammler was "alert to the peril and disgrace of explanations, he was himself no mean explainer"[19] - as he proves on numerous occasions, particularly in response to Margotte and Lal, and even, at one comical juncture, when Angela, racked with anxiety over the impending death of her father, fears that Sammler "was trying to turn the subject in a theoretical direction"[154]. Moreover, the world around him may seem bestial, full of "confused sex-excrement militancy, explosiveness, abusiveness, tooth-showing, Barbary Ape howling"[43] - but Sammler's own reactions are curiously animalistic. Sammler may claim to partake in "aesthetic consumption of the environment"[44], but it his sense of *smell* which appears to determine many of his judgments. This olfactory sensitivity is often extremely disturbing - he smells Angela's "sensual womanhood"[30], notes with distaste that the dirty female students who had "resolved to stink together in defiance of a corrupt tradition" were "naturally more prone to grossness, had more

smells, needed more washing, clipping, binding, pruning, grooming, perfuming and training"[36], senses the "usual smell of long-seated bottoms, of sour shoes, of tobacco muck, of stogies, cologne, face powder" on public transport[44], and is aware of "a slightly unclean odour from the rear. The merest hint of fecal carelessness" emanating from Wallace"[87]. Detecting spoors everywhere, Sammler's nose is "a peculiarly delicate recording system"[87-88] - yes indeed! Additionally, in the opinion of the apish student heckler, Sammler is all washed up because his sexual potency is a thing of the past. But this view could not be more wrong. Sammler may be appalled at the prevailing "sexual madness" - but he, too, cannot escape its powerful grip. In a nicely understated sentence, we are informed that "Sammler's own sex impulses" were "perhaps even now not altogether gone"[161]. The old man demonstrates that they are *far* from gone - when Sammler thinks back to his pre-war existence, he is unable, and unwilling, to block the thought of the area (delicacy forbids) "between the legs" of his long dead wife[28]; when his own daughter emerges from bathing, Sammler is aware that he "still received primordial messages", noting that "beneath the waist [there was] a thing [...] to make a lover gasp"[197]; and on every meeting with Angela, "Mr.Minutely-observant Artur Sammler"[12] makes full use of this faculty in appraising the sexual potential of his niece. Indeed, he seems to derive a vicarious thrill from being Angela's confidant, listening to her mad sexual adventures - at the very least he does not exactly discourage her compulsive relation of them. And there is little doubt that Sammler is perversely attracted to the "barbarous-majestical manner"[294], the naked nobility of the black pickpocket. So much so that the thief's exhibitionism occasions in Sammler's mind the reflection that, "in this same biological respect he was comely enough, in his own Jewish way"[66]. He is even incautious enough to hope that Elya had had love affairs, due to the latter's inability to find satisfaction in his sexually cold wife[276].

Furthermore, Sammler has much more in common with the psycopathic lunatic Eisen than might at first appear to be the case. Both have come through horrendous wartime experiences, Sammler in Poland, Eisen at Stalingrad. Like his son-in-law, Sammler is prone to shattering fits of rage which lay him up for a week with "intense migraines"[27]. And when Eisen is savagely bludgeoning the black pickpocket (with his 'artistic' creations) he pauses to confront Sammler with the brutal reasoning which lies behind his blood-lust:-

> Eisen [...] seemed amused at Sammler's ludicrous inconsistency. He said, 'You can't hit a man like this just once. When you hit him you must really hit him. Otherwise he'll kill you. You know. We both fought in the war. You were a partisan. You had a gun. So don't you know?'[291]

The fact is that Sammler *does* know, for he himself had pitilessly murdered an unarmed German soldier in the Zamosht Forest all those years ago - and had experienced a thrilling joy in so doing:-

> Mr. Sammler himself was able to add, to the basic wisdom, that to kill the man he had ambushed in the snow had given him pleasure. Was it only pleasure? It was more. It was joy [...] When he fired his gun, Sammler, himself nearly a corpse, burst into life. Freezing in Zamosht Forest, he had often dreamed of being near a fire. Well, this was more sumptuous than fire. His heart felt lined with brilliant, rapturous satin. To kill the man and to kill him without pity, for he was dispensed from pity. There was a flash, a blot of fiery white. When he fired again it was less to make sure of the man than to try again for that bliss. To drink more flames.[140-141]

And, as a final point, is Sammler's devotion to the works of Meister Eckhart not all too similar to his daughter's "horrible-comical obsession"[51] with Wells? In short, Sammler is not the censorious moral pillar many critics believe him to be - he is in fact drawn to and attracted by the absurd excitement generated by the crazy crowd (he repeats, time and again, his journeys on the bus which is the 'territory' of the

black pickpocket - "he craved a repetition"[11].) So deep is this attraction that Sammler can be seen as being rather akin to Poe's Man of the Crowd - the man who seeks in the multitudes a remedy to his terrible sense of isolation. Sammler is very much a part of his time, of these conditions, a fact which he (if not too many critics) seems to sense - "My dear girl, in spite of my years, I am a man of the modern age"[30]. He may try to convince himself that "the place of honour" was outside this time, but is blocked by the realisation that "what was achieved by remoteness, by being simply a vestige, a visiting consciousness which happened to reside in a West Side bedroom, did not entitle one to the outside honours"[73]. Despite everything, *this is* Mr.Sammler's planet.

Just like the other Bellow heroes, Sammler is torn between notions of the value of the self, and the importance of human brotherhood - and just like the other heroes, he is unable to resolve this paradox. Sammler sees the chaos of those around him resulting from the fact that, in his view, the "liberation into individuality has not been a great success"[228]. This emancipation has become so grotesquely elaborated that what Sammler witnesses around him, not with rancour but with regret, is the failure of the self. One of Bellow's most acute diagnoses of the modern condition, which he has frequently mentioned in interview, is the observation that "a degenerate negative romanticism is at the core of modern mass culture [...] popular nihilism"[13] - that the twentieth century has "inverted Romanticism by substituting hate for love and nihilism for self-realisation."[14] This view is most certainly shared by Sammler who sees that a "Dark Romanticism now took hold"[33]:-

He saw the increasing triumph of Enlightenment - Liberty, Fraternity, Equality, Adultery! Enlightenment, universal education, universal suffrage, the rights of the majority recognised by all governments, the rights of women, the rights of children, the rights of criminals, the unity of different races affirmed, social security, public health, the dignity of the person, the right to justice [...] but liberal beliefs did not seem capable of self-defense, and you could smell decay. You could see the

suicidal impulses of civilization pushing strongly. You wondered whether this Western culture could survive universal dissemination [...] whether the worst enemies of civilization might not prove to be its petted intellectuals who attacked it at its weakest moments -attacked it in the name of proletarian revolution, in the name of reason and in the name of irrationality, in the name of visceral depth, in the name of sex, in the name of perfect instantaneous freedom. For what it amounted to was limitless demand - insatiability, refusal of the doomed creature (death being sure and final) to go away from this earth unsatisfied. A full bill of demand and complaint was therefore presented by each individual. Nonnegotiable. Recognising no scarcity of supply in any human department. Enlightenment? Marvelous! But out of hand, wasn't it?[32-34]

It is this terribly extended demand for the freedom to undergo all forms of experience - to *be* everything and everyone - to cram as much as possible into a horribly brief existence, which leads to the pitiful spectacle of debased, gimcrack and, importantly from Sammler's point of view, helplessly public and amoral individuality. The true self is submerged beneath "the whole experience of mankind [...] covering each separate life its flood"[26]:-

Art increased, and a sort of chaos. More possibility, more actors, apes, copy-cats, more invention, more fiction, illusion, more fantasy, more despair [...] Just look (Sammler looked) at this imitative anarchy of the streets - these Chinese revolutionary tunics, these babes in unisex toyland, these surrealist warchiefs, Western stagecoach drivers - Ph.Ds in philosophy, some of them [...] They sought originality. They were obviously derivative [...] of Hollywood extras. Acting mythic. Casting themselves into chaos, hoping to adhere to higher consciousness, to be washed up on the shores of truth. Better, thought Sammler, to accept the inevitability of imitation and then to imitate good things [...] But choose higher representations. Otherwise the individual must be the failure he now sees and knows himself to be.[148-49]

Sammler, "aware of the suffering"[229] underlying this dreadful comedy, reinforces the point in his talk with Dr Lal:-

Hearts that get no real wage, souls that find no nourishment. Falsehoods, unlimited. Desire, unlimited. Possibility, unlimited. Impossible demands upon complex realities, unlimited [...] But one notices most a peculiar play-acting, an elaborate and sometimes quite artistic manner of presenting oneself as an individual and a strange desire for originality, distinction, *interest* - yes, *interest*! [...] modern

man [...] has a fever of originality. The idea of the uniqueness of the soul. An excellent idea. A true idea. But in these forms? In these poor forms? Dear God! With hair, with clothes, with drugs and cosmetics, with genitalia, with round trips through evil, monstrosity, and orgy, with even God approached through obscenities? How terrified the soul must be in this vehemence, how little that is really dear to it it can see in these Sadic exercises.[229]

The amoral aspect of the false self is given shocking clarity in Sammler's obsessive remembrances about the hideous burlesque of Chaim Rumkowski, the Nazi-installed mock ruler of the Jews of Lodz, the "King of rags and shit"[232]. Rumkowski, with his "antics of failed individuality, the grand seigneur or dictatorial absurdities"[231] presided over the death of half a million people - what self-mutilation was necessary to play this role one can only guess. At any rate, since Rumkowski eventually stepped voluntarily into the train bound for Auschwitz, the degree of self-hatred on his part must have become intolerable. The relevance of this morbid circus to Sammler is correctly identified by Judie Newman:- "The rise of the atomistic individual has created, in Sammler's opinion, a world populated with Rumkowskis, each a king in a circumscribed sphere only by dint of ignoring the existence of a wider universe in which their actions occur."[15] But Sammler is not overcome by the urge to rage or condemn - rather, the sight of the meretricious, interchangeable and foundationless self induces in him only sympathy and sadness. He understands the agonised craving for recognition which underlies Bruch's sexual compulsion[62]; he senses "the undertones appealing really for help" beneath Feffer's chaos[110]; recognises that Margotte "was a good soul"[132]; feels pity when Wallace laments that "I never had any dignity to start with"[241]; and, despite the trouble she causes him, and the lunatic deformations of her personality, tells Shula that "you're a good daughter, the best of any. No better daughter"[311]. What Sammler seeks to encourage is the development of an ethical, *inner* self - his aim is "to bring out the weakness of the outer forms which are at present available for our humanity, and the pitiable lack of confidence in them [...] as long as there is no

ethical life and everything is poured so barbarously and recklessly into personal gesture this [misery] must be endured"[233,235]. Positing the concept of a genius for the "common life"[147], of discharging one's actions in accordance with everyday duty, Sammler articulates his fervent hope that there is an "implicit morality in the will to live"[220]:-

> When you know what pain is, you agree that not to have been born is better. But being born one respects the powers of creation, one obeys the will of God - with whatever inner reservations truth imposes [...] The pain of duty makes the creature upright, and this uprightness is no negligible thing.[220]

Thus it is how Sammler believes the formation of the 'true self' will come about. But, as Lal points out, one's duties can easily become intolerable - "...duty is pain. Duty is hateful-misery, oppressive"[220] - and so not only morality in the will-to-live but the will-to-live itself is threatened with extinction. And in Sammler's conviction that "a few may comprehend that it is the strength to do one's duty daily and promptly that makes saints and heroes"[93], there is also the inherent possibility that such a philosophy will produce madmen and irrelevant martyrs, becoming part of that remoteness which Sammler had earlier rejected. The dangers of a passive stoicism have already been seen all too clearly in the figures of Schlossberg and Herzog.

But if Sammler is dismayed by the signs that the self is crumbling, his hope of solace in the ultimate unity of his species is tenuous. Pre-war, Sammler had been involved in Olaf Stapledon's and Gerald Heard's 'Cosmopolis' project for the creation of a World State, "a service society based on a rational scientific attitude toward life"[41]. Though he still looks back on it half-fondly, as a "kind-hearted ingenuous, stupid scheme"[41], the war, with all of its scientific barbarism and irrationality, had inevitably vitiated this ideal. Nevertheless, Sammler's slender feelings of brotherhood, of *belonging*, remain - but mostly on a level which seems divorced

from the human, in the rarified atmosphere of a desperate spirituality. True, the intimations of a commonality firmly grounded in the human are there - "All about was a softness of perhaps dissolved soot, or of air passed through many breasts, or metabolized in multitudinous brains, or released from as many intestines, and it got to one - oh, deeply, too!"[117] - but such outlines of the "whole" on a material plane can just as easily be dismissed by Sammler as "childish notion[s]" which led to "all this madness, mad religions, LSD, suicide, to crime"[181]. More frequent are the passages which indicate a *desire* to commune, rather than an actual belief in the certainty of experiencing such community:-

> No, his personal idea was of the human being conditioned by other human beings, and knowing that present arrangements were not, *sub specie aeternitatis*, *the* truth, but that one should be satisfied with such truth as one could get by approximation. Trying to live with a civil heart. With disinterested charity. With a sense of the mystic potency of humankind. With an inclination to believe in archetypes of goodness. A desire for virtue was no accident.[136]

Sammler often thinks about the "psychic unity" of Man[189], citing the example from *War and Peace* where Pierre Bezukhov exchanges a 'human look' with the cruel French general about to order his execution, and, as a result of such contact, Pierre is spared. Though sympathizing "with such a desire for such a belief" however[189], Sammler sadly concludes:-

> 'I myself never knew it to work. No, I never saw it happen. It is a thing worth praying for. And it is based on something. It's not an arbitrary idea. It's based on the belief that there is the same truth in the heart of every human being, or a splash of God's own spirit, and that this is the richest thing we share in common. And up to a point I would agree. But though it's not an arbitrary idea, I wouldn't count on it.'[189]

The reason, of course, why Sammler is unable fully to accept this idea is that such a look from the unarmed German soldier who died at Sammler's hands made no impression on the latter - there was no bond, however slight, between the two. Thus

it is that Sammler's hopes have a vague and forlorn air about them, and why he can often lapse into terror of his species, as he does whenever he passes along Broadway:-

> By a convergence of all minds and all movements the conviction transmitted by this crowd seemed to be that reality was a terrible thing, and that the final truth about Mankind was overwhelming and crushing. This vulgar, cowardly conclusion, rejected by Sammler with all his heart, was the implicit local orthodoxy...[280]

In attempting to straddle the gap between the false self and some form of other-worldly unity, Sammler holds up the example of Elya Gruner as combining elements of true individuality with brotherly concern. Elya, with his "Old World family feelings"[11], had "a passion for kinships"[82], and was "a dependable man - a man who took thought for others"[85]. And though Sammler seems to be under no illusions about Elya - "he's touchy, boastful, he repeats himself. He's vain, grouchy, proud. But he's done well, and I admire him"[303] - the latter appears to embody the ethical personalism combined with familial devotion to duty to which Sammler aspires. And to a certain extent this is true, since Gruner has been gracious enough to support both Sammler and Shula, and repeatedly expresses his anxiety over his own wayward children's future after his impending death. But Elya's "old system"[302] does not seem to make an imprint on anyone but Sammler. Angela grudgingly accedes to Sammler's characterisation of Elya - "So he's human. All right, he's human"[303] - but neither she nor Wallace can come to any kind of moral rapprochement with their dying father. Moreover, Sammler discovers during the course of the novel that Elya had performed illegal abortions at the behest of the Mafia, the proceeds of which he has carefully hidden from his admittedly avaricious offspring. So, in reaffirming his kinship with Elya, Sammler again seems to place the relationship out of this world:-

About essentials, almost nothing could be said. Still, signs could be made, should be made, must be made. One should declare something like this: 'However actual I may seem to you and you to me, *we are not as actual as all that.* We will die. Nevertheless there is a bond. There is a bond.'[261]

In essence, Sammler dangles between a surrender to the onrush of the false construct of individuality and empathy with the underlying, stifled humanity; and between a revulsion for the mad crowd and an unpromising transcendental unity. It is an unenviable position in which to be - his compassion is evident, but so is his powerlessness.

Touching on Sammler's transcendent longings brings us to a further area in which he dangles - between the human and beyond the human, between creatureliness and spirituality, between the finite and the infinite. In seeking a way out of "spatial-temporal prison"[53], Sammler's interest in Lal's aiming at the moon extends, as was said, only so far as the endeavour is "advantageous for us metaphysically"[237]. The moon, though distant, is still finite - "Finite is still feeling through the veil, examining the naked inner reality with a gloved hand"[53]. Sammler's desire to transcend the finite comes in large measure from his terror of a final, absolute *creaturely* death. He had "once been on far more easy terms with death" - his existence had, after all, been a sort of Life *in* Death - but now, with the advancing years, he "had lost ground, regressed"[105]. Battered by images which signal the end - Elya in his hospital bed, the metaphorical death of humanity he sees in the New York streets, even his visit to the subway recalling his incarceration in the funeral vault where he hid from the Nazis during the war - Sammler's ache for the infinite appears to have reached such a pitch that he is almost convinced of its veracity:-

Blessed are the poor in spirit. Poor is he who has nothing. He who is poor in spirit is receptive of all spirit. Now God is the spirit of spirits. The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, and peace. See to it that you are stripped of all creatures, of all consolation from creatures. For certainly as long as creatures comfort and are able to comfort you, you will never find true comfort. But if nothing can comfort you save God, truly God will console you.[253]

Although Sammler "could not say that he literally believed what he was reading (a passage from Meister Eckhart) [...] he cared to read nothing but this"[253-54]. Moreover, he claims that "...almost daily I have strong impressions of eternity" which take the form of "God adumbrations"[237] and a place where "all is not flatly knowable" and "one's ape restiveness would stop"[236,237]. But we have already seen how much at home Sammler is in the creaturely, physical world. And, in spite of the fact that "he wanted, with God, to be free from the bondage of the ordinary and the finite. A soul released from Nature, from impressions, and from everyday life"[117], Sammler is aware that "in the human setting, along with everyone else, among particulars of ordinary life he *was* human", is open to the "low tricks" and "doggish hind-sniffing charm" of creatureliness[117], and is "so powerfully, so persuasively, drawn back to human conditions", to "a return match with the persistent creature"[118]. It is also worth mentioning in passing how much of Sammler's philosophy of the ethical self is bound up with "the bondage of the ordinary and finite". In any case, Sammler is also uncomfortable with notions of the infinite. He does "not personally care for the illimitable"[183], and declares that "I like ceilings, and the high better than the low"[184] (immediately contradicting his assertion that "I seem to be a depth man rather than a height man"[183]). Sammler's apprehension over the limitless is due to the realisation on his part that it is an infinite desire which engenders the nihilism which he divines to be rife among the masses - but this desire is mostly on a material level. It does seem, however, that Sammler is alive to the danger that a passion for the spiritual infinite could be just as mad, cranky, and horribly detrimental to the person as a passion for the experiential infinite. He rejects Kierkegaard's idea of the 'Knight of Faith', the "real prodigy" who, "having set its relations with the infinite, was entirely at home in the finite"[62]. In the twentieth century, as Sammler has discovered to his cost, such a figure would become, and did become, lawless, unaccountable, voraciously

smashing old-fashioned "humanly appointed laws in obedience to God"[63]. In sum, Sammler is "the human being at the point where he attempted to obtain his release from being human"[251] - but armed with an awareness that transcendence is "also getting rid of the human being"[235]. Sammler dangles in a nebulous area "willing as God wills"[236], a foot in either camp of animalistic experience and transcendent eternity, maintaining the paradoxical state of unstable equilibrium.

This last statement sums up Artur Sammler to such a degree that it is difficult to appreciate the jaundiced condemnation of many critics. In a passage that could have been written for any one of Bellow's gallery of heroes, Sammler reflects that "Once take a stand, once draw a base line, and contraries will assail you. Declare for normalcy and you will be stormed by aberrancies. All postures are mocked by their opposites"[118]. So it is that Sammler is "someone between the human and not-human states, between content and emptiness, between full and void, meaning and not-meaning, between this world and no world"[290], who exemplifies "this vivid shuffle with its pangs of higher intuition from the one side and the continual muddy suck of the grave underfoot"[260-61]. It logically follows that if the view of the novel as bitter and defeatist is incorrect in the light of Sammler's dangling, then it is equally impossible to concur with the view of a minority of critics who cast Sammler as "an exponent of old-style humanism"[16] or see the novel as "a beautiful defense of our common humanity"[17] - it should be clear that Sammler is too contradictory, his sense of brotherhood too tentative and *religious*, his experiences too scarring for such a conclusion to be justified. His final words over Elya's body are more of a sad prayer and a final, plaintive articulation of his philosophy of Duty than a definitive affirmation of a humanist ideal:-

'Remember, God, the soul of Elya Gruner, who, as willingly as possible and as well as he was able, and even to an intolerable point, and even in suffocation and even as death was coming was eager, even childishly perhaps (may I be forgiven for this), even with a certain servility, to do what was required of him. At his best this man was much kinder than at my very best I have ever been or could ever be. He was

aware that he must meet, and he did meet - through all the confusion and degraded clowning of this life through which we are speeding - he did meet the terms of his contract. The terms which, in his inmost heart, each man knows. As I know mine. As all know. For that is the truth of it - that we all know, God, that we know, that we know, we know, we know'.[313]

There are the threads of a shared experience and knowledge explicit in Sammler's orison, but the truth of it is that Sammler is by no means certain that "we all know" - for he has seen little to confirm this view. More properly, his benediction reflects the hope that, obscured beneath the junk of false consciousness, beneath the spurious trappings of modern living, there lies something unchanging, vital and elevating in the human being. That it is a deeply conditional aspiration should come as no surprise.

References

The epigraphs are, respectively:-

Lowell, Robert: 'Waking Early Sunday Morning', from *Robert Lowell's Poems: A Selection*, edited by Jonathan Raban, Faber and Faber, 1974, p104.

Nietzsche, Friedrich: *Beyond Good and Evil*, Penguin Classics, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, England, 1990, p103.

1 Clayton. Postscript to *In Defence of Man*, cited in the 'Introduction' of the present study.

2 Surprisingly in the light of (1), Clayton had at least partly foreseen what Bellow's next novel, post-*Herzog*, would concern itself with:- "I suspect that in Bellow's next novel the hero will begin with a sense of community and struggle to live in and create a community - to make in our society a community in which a man can find fulfillment." Clayton, *I.D.M.*, p253.

3 De Mott, Benjamin: 'Saul Bellow and the Dogmas of Possibility', *Saturday Review* 7 February, 1970, 25-28, 37 (pp37,27,27).

4 Galloway, David D,: 'Mr.Sammler's Planet: Bellow's Failure of Nerve', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 19.1, (1973) pp17-28 (pp19, 28).

5 Porter: *W.T.P.*, p180.

6 Rodrigues: *Q.F.T.H.*, p209.

7 Kazin, Alfred: 'Though he slay me', *New York Review of Books*, 3 December, 1970, pp3-4, (p3).

8 Glenday *S.B.D.H.*, p112: "Unfortunately there are few grounds for arguing that Sammler is intended to be an ironic portrait".

9 Rodrigues: *Q.F.T.H.*, p210.

10 Bellow, Saul: *Mr.Sammler's Planet*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex England, 1972, (First published by Viking Press in USA 1970) p149. All subsequent page references will appear in the text.

11 Brans interview in Trachtenberg, *C.E.S.B.*, p68.

12 Porter: *W.T.P.*, p179.

13 Bellow, Saul: *Tanner Lectures on Human Values*, 'A Writer From Chicago', ed. McMurrin, p183.

14 Bellow, Saul: 'Marx at my Table', *The Guardian*, 10 April, 1993,, p23.

15 Newman, Judie: *Saul Bellow and History*, p140.

16 Siegel, Ben: 'Saul Bellow and Mr.Sammler: Absurd seekers of high qualities', in *Rovit, S.B.C.C.S.* pp122-134' (p127).

17 Stock, Irvin: 'Man in Culture', *Commentary* 49 (1970); revised and reprinted in Trachtenberg, *C.E.S.B.*, pp41-48 (p48).

## Chapter Eight

*Humboldt's Gift* - Systems of Transcendence.

"We have described truly enough the soul as we at present see it. But we see it in a state like that of Glaucus the sea-god, and its original nature is as difficult to see as his was after long immersion had broken and worn away and deformed his limbs, and covered him with shells and seaweed and rock, till he looked more like a monster than what he really was. That is the sort of state we see the soul reduced to by countless evils."

Plato, *The Republic.*

"Flaubert complained that the exterior world was 'disgusting, enervating, corruptive and brutalising [...] I am turning towards a kind of aesthetic mysticism', he wrote."

Saul Bellow.

In what one suspects was a spirit of profound relief after the perceived nightmares of *Mr.Sammler's Planet*, Malcolm Bradbury greeted the publication of *Humboldt's Gift* with the joyous declaration that "Bellow has bounced back, back to the panoramic, picaresque, ebullient vein of some of his earlier novels."[1] To a certain extent this is indeed the case. Not only is there a perceptible attenuation in the claustrophobic tensions of Artur Sammler's world, but *Humboldt's Gift*, suffused as it is with a varied array of often outlandish characters, seems most closely to recall the 'adventures' of a certain Mr.March. Moreover, the air of plaintive comedy which has its roots in that novel published over twenty years previously is given perhaps its most full bodied realisation in the calamitous enterprises of Charlie Citrine. However, the depth and scope of *Humboldt's Gift* was seen to so far outweigh that of *The Adventures of Augie March* that Eusebio Rodrigues, in a delirium of sudorific exultation, bursts forth with the splendid news that in "attempting a Mahabharata-like novel, Bellow had to direct all the creative energies he now possessed and use all the fictional strategies he commanded to demonstrate and dramatize such a cyclocosmic vision".[2] Recovering from these tidings, though, and attempting to penetrate beneath the legend, we find that Charlie is not simply an ageing Augie -

but he does share, and indeed takes to an extreme, the central characteristic of the younger hero.

It was noted earlier that there is something deeply elusive about Augie - his 'nothing self' - and Charlie reflects this slipperiness of being almost to the point of invisibility. So difficult is it to pin Charlie down that there are several differing interpretations of his status. Jonathan Wilson sees Citrine as an "avatar of his creator", noting that, "in *Humboldt's Gift* Bellow seems finally to have consumed himself".[3] Roger Shattuck divines that "the more closely Bellow projects himself into Citrine, the more mocking his voice seems to become", and concludes that "in *Humboldt's Gift*, Bellow gets in his own way".[4] Whilst Charles Newman declares that "Citrine is a character apart from Bellow's other narrators", averring that "Herzog would find Citrine on many occasions cliched, pretentious, a facsimile of the very intellect he claims to despise most, the professor *manque* [...and...] Sammler would find him morally passive and intellectually sloppy".[5] Shattuck seems closest to an appreciation of the ironic endorsement in a Bellow narrative, that near concurrence of authorial encouragement and distance which occasions the hero's 'dangling'. But since this is a characteristic common to all Bellow's main protagonists, it does not in itself explain the particular vagueness surrounding Citrine. I think such vagueness can be accounted for in two ways. First, the strength of the portrayal of many of the other characters in the novel, especially Humboldt and Cantabile. Charlie (like Augie), can often be overshadowed by the sheer force of these frantic personalities; indeed, he confesses at one point to being "the expressive delegate of other people".[6] Second, and most pertinent in this case, is Citrine's recurring disposition to "switch out"[83] of his environment and attempt to enter a mystical realm of transcendent beauty, an area which seems to be fashioned from a reading of Plato, Blake, Emerson and, in particular, of Rudolf Steiner:

"when", laments Charlie in an echo of Steiner's most famous work, "would I rise at last above all this stuff, the accidental, the merely phenomenal, the wastefully and randomly human, and be fit to enter higher worlds?"[291].[7] This seems a point almost too obvious to mention; but it should be emphasised not only because Citrine is without doubt the most overtly esoteric of Bellow's creations (to such a degree that John J.Clayton cautioned Bellow against a fiction "which cuts itself off from life"[8]), but because it is Charlie's dualistic relationship to his mystical experiences around which the inability to fully define him coalesces. Thus Newman is not entirely wrong when he sees Citrine as "a character apart". To be sure, Charlie is a dangling man - but the difference lies in the impression that he has, at least to some degree, *accepted* and come to terms with much of the appalling chaos and feverish dissolution of the modern world, that he is a man with a sense of wry rapprochement. Therefore it is his urge to opt out, to move on, which receives our attention, rather than the diagnoses of contemporary maladies (which, it should be noted, are by no means reduced in *their* force of portrayal). Thus it is that Charlie seems to evade concrete definition, and why his narrative speculations can often appear utterly divorced from 'real-life' situations and contexts. Yet for all that, Charlie's immersion in harum-scarum Chicago, in what he styles the "moronic inferno"[35], is just as potent as his spiritual craving (and certainly more entertaining). Charlie is just as likely to be forced to inhale the fragrance of the erstwhile contents of Cantabile's bowels as he is to undergo a coruscating visionary experience! As these two areas of the crassly material and the gloriously transcendent vie with each other, Citrine's shimmering presence in the middle provides further evidence of the unaltered state of the Bellow hero.

When we first encounter Charlie Citrine, successful author (biographer of Woodrow Wilson and Harry Hopkins), celebrity and public 'personality', he is

engaged in one of his numerous remembrances of his one-time friend and mentor, the poet Von Humboldt Fleisher. On the surface, the fates of the two men could not be more different. Whilst Charlie fraternises with politicians, pens Broadway hits, delights in the company of sensuous and sophisticated women, and, in short, has a "proven ability to earn big sums"[230], Humboldt faithfully enacts the classic role of the artist in the United States, by becoming a self-destructive "farcical martyr"[345] who reaches Potter's Field via Bellevue:-

> For after all Humboldt did what poets in crass America are supposed to do. He chased ruin and death even harder than he chased women. He blew his talent and his wealth and reached home, the grave, in a dusty slide. He plowed himself under [...] For some reason this awfulness is peculiarly appreciated by business and technological America. The country is proud of its dead poets. It takes terrific satisfaction in the poets' testimony that America is too tough, too big, too much, too rugged, that American reality is overpowering. And to be a poet is a school thing, a skirt thing, a church thing. The weakness of the spiritual powers is proved in the childishness, madness, drunkenness, and despair of these martyrs.[117-118]

And the theatricality of Humboldt's mission (his only published collection of poetry is entitled 'Harlequin Ballads') is encapsulated in this prescription:-

> But no, instead of being a poet he was merely the figure of a poet. He was enacting "The Agony of the American Artist." And it was not Humboldt, it was the USA that was making its point: Fellow Americans, listen. If you abandon materialism and the normal pursuits of life you wind up at Bellevue like this poor kook".[156]

Humboldt, "passionately liv[ing] out the theme of Success [...] died a failure"[6]. For to be a Success in art in the USA is to *be* a failure. A memorable amalgam of Poe, John Berryman and Delmore Schwartz (and indeed, in his brilliant gibberish, of Dr.Tamkin from Seize the Day), Humboldt's artistic purity is the mortal enemy of ubiquitous and turbulent reality, of the 'Great Noise', "the noise of technology, the noise of money or advertising and promotion, the noise of the media, the noise of miseducation [...] the terrible excitement and distraction generated by the crises of

modern life".[9] Citrine, on the other hand, is racked with regret over the impurity of his works and his status, "filled [...] with guilt and shame"[51] because his debased and commercial 'Art' merely adds to the prevailing turmoil and agitation. As he explains to his old sweetheart:-

> ...society claims more and more and more of your inner self and infects you with its restlessness. It trains you in distraction, colonizes consciousness as fast as consciousness advances. The true poise, that of contemplation or imagination, sits right on the border of sleep and dreaming. Now, Naomi, as I was lying stretched out in America, determined to resist its material interests and hoping for redemption by art, I fell into a deep snooze that lasted for years and decades. Evidently I didn't have what it took. What it took was more strength, more courage, more stature.[306]

Maybe so, but such thoughts are more than a little self-indulgent on Citrine's part, as he is fully aware that the possession of such courage might lead to ridicule, ruination, and death in the doss-house. After all, subsequent to informing us that he had "always loved" Humboldt[2], he avoids the chance of reconciliation with his estranged former teacher, then in a state of terminal material and spiritual penury, going so far as to hide behind a parked car so that Humboldt who "had death all over him"[7] cannot see him. Charlie is intensely troubled by this recollection, not only because of his moral cowardice, but also because of the message it transmits to him about the value of his life's endeavour. Must the *bona fide* artist in America be a wretched, shambolic and doomed figure?

Yet all is not as straightforward as it may seem - for although their paths seem to have taken diametrically opposed routes, the truth is that Humboldt and Charlie have more in common than perhaps even they suspect. Both are, to a significant degree, actors. We have already noted the indicators of a performance in Humboldt's life and work as he demonstrates the failure of the spiritual. Charlie, too, has assumed the trappings of a showman, not only in his celebrity status

(Charlie is in fact famous not for his work, but is simply famous for *being* famous - he is a 'somebody' *because* he is in 'Who's Who'), but also by adopting the disinterested manners of the 'world-historical individual', aloof from the concerns of petty humanity.[10] And although Charlie is not guilty of taking this intuition to Raskolnikovian lengths, he is nevertheless culpable in respect of acting as if he bore a unique imprint which, when released, would transform the race. It is with some justification, we feel, that Cantabile accuses Citrine of despising the "people of the world"[96], that ex-wife Denise upbraids him for having "delusions about being a marvelous noble person"[43-44], and that mistress Renata describes as "boring" Citrine's efforts to "dope [his] way out of the human condition"[430]. Belatedly, Charlie seems to cut through all of this pompous tomfoolery, realising that what he had created was merely "a superior emptiness"[323] - although in his later Steineresque meditations there is a strong sense that Charlie sees himself as a special conduit for new and essential information. In fairness to Charlie, there are no prizes for guessing whose 'artistic' influence sent him in this direction! Indeed, there is a deep ambiguity about Humboldt's 'art' itself. The 'Harlequin Ballads' are produced during a contented period of Humboldt's life. When he degenerates into wife-beater, drunk, pill popper and madman (and thus becomes possessed of the true credentials of the 'American Artist'), he is creatively barren - further enforcing the notion that he is merely a performing clown. This is not to doubt the fact that true art can be produced by those who are not alcoholic lunatics, but rather to question why Humboldt fell into this role: did he feel-*compelled* to? Moreover, since his first flush of fame as a poet, Humboldt seems to have devoted his attention to two things. First, there are his comic attempts to land sinecures at major universities (at one stage, and in the knowledge that Humboldt had secured at least four of these, Citrine half wistfully, half acidly comments that "He (Humboldt) was at the height of his

reputation though not of his powers"[17]), and second, there is his headlong pursuit of riches, crystallised in an amusing exchange with Charlie:-

> Humboldt had the conviction that there was wealth in the world - not his - to which he had a sovereign claim and that he was bound to get it. He had told me once that he was fated to win a big lawsuit, a million-dollar suit. 'With a million bucks,' he said, 'I'll be free to think of nothing but poetry.'
> 'How will this happen?'
> 'Somebody will wrong me.'
> 'Wrong you a million dollars worth?'
> 'If I'm obsessed, as a poet shouldn't be, there's a reason for it,' [...] 'The reason is that we're Americans after all [...] Walpole said it was natural for free men to think about money. Why? Because money is freedom, that's why'.[159]

If what emerges is not exactly a sense of intrinsic falseness about Humboldt's art, then at the very least there is something degraded - and degrading - about it. Humboldt turns himself from an artist into something of a cultural functionary. It is doubly ironic, then, that in the film treatment Humboldt bequeaths to Charlie, the protagonist's experiences not only mirror the vitiated and soiled nature of Citrine's 'art', but also lament Humboldt's own lost ideal. Yet if Humboldt becomes something of a Machiavelli, then Charlie has been one all along! And only Charlie seems to have suppressed this knowledge. For not only was Humboldt wary of the intense ambition of this disingenuous Rube, but Charlie's oldest friend George points out to him that "When you were younger you were on the make. You may not realize it but you were damn clever and canny about your career"[314]. And because of the nature of Citrine's biographies, old acquaintance Huggins accuses him of being an apologist for the American system of government, "a front man and stooge, practically an Andrei Vishinsky"[321]. Charlie's success is a testament to the fact that these charges might not be without foundation. And yet even here there is a bond with Humboldt. For if Humboldt's metier had led him to poverty, madness and destitution, then Charlie's accomplishments have only led him to be a target for freaks, lunatics, gold-digging bimbos and grasping lawyers. Charlie is bombarded

with demands from this menagerie to the extent that, like Tommy in *Seize the Day,* he "haemorrhages money". Now, though, tired with the blandishments of the world (or perhaps more accurately the pressures they induce), Charlie seems to desire nothing more than a way out of such 'success'. One thing in his favour is that no-one disagrees that Charlie has "a real soul"[307]. Encouraged by Humboldt's parting shot in his will - "we are not natural beings but supernatural beings"[347] - Citrine determines, much as did Henderson (although Charlie has more knowledge of Shelley's poetry than does Eugene), to "burst the spirit's sleep", to search behind the Mayan 'veil' for eternity, rejecting "the plastered idols of the Appearances"[16]. It is characteristic of the Bellow hero, however, that the more he tries to cultivate the powers of the soul, the more he is immersed in the chaos of the fallen world: in Charlie's case in the crackpot schemes of Cantabile and Thaxter, and in the webs and strategies of hoodlum lawyers and Clausewitzian females. Indeed, it is equally characteristic that the hero is *attracted* to this world.

"Absorbed in determining what a human being is"[89], Charlie's growing conviction that he is more than the sum of his fleshly parts is given recurrent focus, his mystical intimations encroaching more and more into his daily life. He puts his nascent ability to peer behind the appearances of reality down to a recovery of something long-forgotten, innocent and unselfconscious:-

> And last spring, almost an elderly fellow now, I found that I had left the sidewalk and that I was following the curb and looking. For what? What was I doing? Suppose I had found a dime? Suppose I found a fifty-cent piece? What then? I don't know how the child's soul had gotten back, but it was back. Everything was melting. Ice, discretion, maturity. What would Humboldt have said to this? [3]

Humboldt would no doubt have approved, as Charlie takes up one of his former mentor's ideas, that of the 'child-soul' belonging to some sort of Platonic home-world:-

One of Humboldt's themes was the perennial human feeling that there was an original world, a home-world, which was lost. Sometimes he spoke of poetry as the merciful Ellis Island where a host of aliens began their naturalization and of this planet as a thrilling but insufficiently humanised imitation of that home-world. He spoke of our species as castaways.[24]

The connection of poets and artists (and even those as dodgy as Humboldt and Charlie) with aliens and children in Business and Scientific America is clearly no coincidence. But, essentially, what the existence of a home-world would mean to Charlie is that he could confront his overbearing terror of Death with the knowledge that the soul is immortal. For Citrine is no less susceptible than any of the other central characters (one thinks particularly of Henderson and Sammler) to an ever-increasing consciousness that the grave might just prove to *be* the ultimate victor. His fear of the end is obvious, as when he agonises over the fates of Demmie and Humboldt, his beloved dead:-

You could simply assume that they had been forever wiped out, as you too would one day be. So if the daily papers told of murders committed in the streets before crowds of neutral witnesses, there was nothing illogical about such neutrality. On the metaphysical assumptions about death everyone in the world had apparently reached, everyone would be snatched, ravished by death, throttled, smothered. This terror and this murdering were the most natural things in the world. And the same conclusions were incorporated into the life of society and present in all its institutions, in politics, education, banking, justice.[263-264]

"Either I conceded the finality of death and refused to have any further intimations, condemned my childish sentimentality and hankering," says Charlie, "or I conducted a full and proper investigation"[263]. So it is that Citrine cleaves to the feeling that the imperishable soul returns after death to the home-world, from where it makes joyous and varied forays of cyclic permanence back into this world:-

At this moment I must say, almost in the form of a deposition, without argument, that I do not believe my birth began my first existence. Nor Humboldt's. Nor

anyone's. On esthetic grounds, if on no others, I cannot accept the view of death taken by most of us, and taken by me during most of my life - on esthetic grounds therefore I am obliged to deny that so extraordinary a thing as a human soul can be wiped out forever.[141]

and:-

The whole thing is disintegrating and reintegrating all the time, and you have to guess whether it's always the same cast of characters or a lot of different characters.[301]

And he invokes Plato to ratify "my sense that this was not my first time around. We had all been here before and would presently be here again. There was another place"[89]. Armed with such Zarathustrian confidence in 'eternal recurrence', Charlie experiences "a kind of light-in-the-being", an inner radiance which was "like the breath of life itself"[177]. And, as always with the Bellow hero, the key to tapping in to this outgrowth of the rich spiritual kingdom beyond lies in the activation of memories occasioned by love. In Charlie's case these are abundant and diverse, involving recollections of his parents, his childhood sweetheart Naomi, his old lodger Menasha, his time with Demmie Vonghel, his salad days with Humboldt, and even a minutely detailed remembrance of the previous day spent with Renata. As he explains to brother Ulick after one particular reminiscence:-

'Do you remember all that? Well, I'll tell you why I bring it up - there are good esthetic reasons why this should not be wiped from the record eternally. No one would put so much heart into things doomed to be forgotten and wasted. Or so much love. Love is gratitude for being. This love would be hate, Ulick, if the whole thing was nothing but a gyp'.[392]

Ulick's indifferent response to this speech, however, shows the difficulty of communicating such sentiments. It is a nice touch, incidentally, that Charlie should describe both his intimations of immortality, and his memories, as "esthetic", bearing in mind the role that "Art" plays in the novel. Such preoccupations, it

seems, represent the true domain of the artist, and the area where potential transcendence is to be sought. But although Charlie desires to dwell with archangels, he cannot escape the limits of the physical, fallen world. And indeed, although he complains about death being incorporated into every facet of life, he can nevertheless find much compensation in the realm of the corporeal. Humboldt had once chided Citrine for being "one of those Axel types that only cares about inner inspiration, no connection with the actual world [...] The actual world can kiss your ass"[122]. He could not have been more wrong. Charlie himself is not quite as candid as he might be:-

> In my case (which I suspect is not so rare as all that) there may have been an incomplete forgetting of the pure soul-life, so that the mineral condition of re-embodiment seemed abnormal, so that from an early age I was taken aback to see eyes move in faces, noses breathe, skins sweat, hairs grow, and the like, finding it comical.[90]

But Charlie's "critical mass of indifference"[35] not only fails to encompass his political hob-nobbing, his susceptibility to all sorts of tawdry awards (the Zig-Zag Book Club), and his exploitation of his celebrity status (to gain advances on unplanned or unpublishable works), but it is also posted missing when it comes to his string of lovers. Not caring, in this instance, to look too far behind "the plastered idols of the appearances", his involvement with the likes of Naomi, Demmie, Denise, Renata and Doris testifies to an unquenchable licentiousness. Age has certainly not withered Charlie. By his own admission he is "a nymph-troubled man"[190], but it is the sort of trouble he welcomes, in order to feed both his vanity and his "sensation-loving soul"[102]. Charlie makes an unconvincing attempt to excuse his increasingly ridiculous adventures of the flesh, but finally capitulates (gladly) to the prevailing sexual madness, asking "what was I to do singlehanded about a force that had seized the whole world?"[206]. It takes Cantabile, in inimitable fashion, to sum Charlie up:-

You want me to believe you have nothing in your thoughts except angels on ladders and immortal spirits but I can see from the way you live that it can't be true. First of all you're a dude. I know your tailor. Secondly you're an old sex-pot ...[184]

Perhaps, though, it is this duality that causes Citrine to turn to the abstruse theories of Rudolf Steiner - for they seem to offer a way to unify his clashing spiritual and physical concerns. It is tempting to view Charlie's involvement with Steiner's apparent quackery as part of the comedy of the novel, a device employed by the author to show how far Charlie is "out of it". No doubt this is partly true. But in interview, Bellow has given backing to the ideas of the Austrian. Evidently with a straight face, the author confesses "to being intrigued with Steiner"; that the founder of anthroposophy "had a great vision and was a powerful poet as well as philosopher and scientist"; and concludes with mock embarrassment that "I hope I will be forgiven if I choose not to see this as a sign that I am slipping".[11] It is difficult to determine the exact amount of mischievousness in these comments (Steiner's theories seem to be subjected to the same form of ironic endorsement to which Bellow subjects his own characters!), but one suspects that in any case Bellow rather enjoys being associated with a supposed mountebank like Steiner, as he has often criticised the absolute value of a scientific 'head-culture' which insists on interpreting phenomena in exclusively empirical terms:-

'We've ceased to marvel at things we can't explain. We've had introductory courses in everything, and therefore we have persuaded ourselves that we can explain anything, we don't have to, but if we wanted to, we could. We are in the position of savage men who have been educated into believing there are no mysteries.'[12]

It would be foolish, therefore, to dismiss out of hand Charlie's Steineresque meditations, to stigmatize them as the work of a crank. At the same time, though, Charlie notes the element of buffoonery in these exercises - "I couldn't make my peace with things like the Moon Evolution, the Fire Spirits, the Sons of Life, with Atlantis, with the lotus flower organs of spiritual perception or the strange mingling

of Abraham with Zarathustra, or the coming together of Jesus and the Buddha. It was all too much for me"[263] - and enjoys an ambivalent relationship with his Steiner tutor, the Tamkin-like (again!) Professor Scheldt (indeed, Charlie cannot help recalling Kafka's memoir of the spiritual king Steiner struggling pathetically to come to terms with that most mundane of physical preoccupations, a head cold[218]). The reason for Charlie's attraction to Steiner, though, is clear. One of the latter's central ideas is that the internal, spiritual world and the external, physical world are indissolubly bound together, and that the intrinsic radiance of this union can be apprehended , by means of specific mental exercises, in a transcendent realm where the powers of the soul can clear away the erroneous divisions of this 'lower-world'. Although Charlie is but "in theosophical kindergarten"[356], he avers that he can go some way toward achieving a knowledge of this higher world, a belief which he outlines to Scheldt:-

> Thinking, the power to think and to know, is a source of freedom. Thinking will make it obvious that spirit exists. The physical body is an agent of the spirit and its mirror. It is an engine and reflection of the spirit. It is the spirit's ingenious memorandum to itself and the spirit sees itself in my body ...[262]

When Charlie is holed up with Renata in a luxurious suite in New York's Plaza Hotel, Steiner's vision seems entirely appropriate:-

> I had the strange hunch that nature itself was not out there, an object world eternally separated from subjects, but that everything external corresponded with something internal, that the two realms were identical and interchangeable, and that nature was my own unconscious being [...] Each thing in nature was an emblem for something in my own soul.[356-357]

And, as he absents himself mentally from an escapade involving Ulick's furious pursuit of money (and food!), Charlie beautifully defines the anthroposophic goal:-

Just as soul and spirit left the body in sleep, they could also be drawn from it in full consciousness with the purpose of observing the inner life of man. The first result of this conscious withdrawal is that everything is reversed. Instead of seeing the external world as we normally do with senses and intellect, initiates can see the circumscribed self from without [...] The external world we no longer see, for we are *it*. The outer world is now the inner [...] From this new circumference you look back to the center, and at the center is your own self. That self, your self is now the external world [...] But what an object! Your eyes are now two radiant suns, filled with light. Your eyes are identified by this radiance. Your ears are identified by sound. From the skin comes a glow. From the human form emanate light, sound, and sparkling electrical forces. This is the physical being when the Spirit looks at it [...] There is a star world within us that can be seen when the Spirit takes a new vantage point outside its body. As for the musculature it is a precipitate of Spirit and the signature of the cosmos is in it. In life and death the signature of the cosmos is within us.[393-394]

Has Charlie, in a transcendence which is founded firmly in the human, managed to resolve the contradictions which have ever assailed the Bellow hero? It seems unlikely, since not only do these revelations of ecstatic union belong by definition to another, briefly glimpsed world, but they are also, in Charlie's case, *prescriptions of desire* rather than actual experiences. Even if Charlie had made a Steineresque breakthrough, he would still have been unable to communicate this intelligence, since perforce those still inhabiting the 'lower world' would find such knowledge unintelligible. But there is a frightening corollary to Steiner's vision, which I believe has gone unnoticed by critics. Equally firm is my view that Bellow himself was not oblivious to this corollary, since it is a theme he developed in his next novel, *The Dean's December*. The fearful irony is that as Charlie moves through the unrelenting squalor and decay of urban and post-industrial Chicago, Steiner's radiant vision receives a potentially horrific focus, in that *outer* ruin may very well reflect *inner* ruin. As always in the Bellow world, every force has its equal - and opposite - reaction.

As any attempt at transcendence necessarily involves a measure of loss of the self, one would expect Citrine to be wearying of the burden of his distinctness. And

though he is not averse to trading on its value in the world, Charlie most closely resembles Herzog when he complains of "the universal tyranny of selfhood"[405]. Aware of the silly demands of the 'I', Charlie, in trying to formulate a plan for his projected masterpiece on the subject of 'Boredom', pinpoints the root cause of the prevalence for such ennui:-

> For me the self-conscious ego is the seat of boredom. This increasing, swelling, domineering, painful self-consciousness is the only rival of the political and social powers that run my life (business, technological-bureaucratic powers, the state). You have a great organised movement of life, and you have the single self, independently conscious, proud of its detachment and its absolute immunity, its stability and its power to remain unaffected by anything whatsoever - by the sufferings of others or by society or by politics or external chaos. In a way it doesn't give a damn [...] the curse of non-caring lies upon this painfully free consciousness [...] For to be fully conscious of oneself as an individual is also to be to be separated from all else.[203]

Ironically, Charlie overestimates the sense of separation on his own behalf, since not only is he the repository of numerous other selves - writers, philosophers, friends, and most particularly his dear departed - but his *magnum opus* on Boredom also demonstrates that society and external chaos *do* exert a grip on his consciousness. His essay seems destined to become a classic example of what Bellow calls "crisis chatter", a dramatized and agitated slurry of distorting 'information' about how what happens 'out there' affects us, a not so insidious virus of the modern need to be kept in a constant state of 'interest'. "The late John Berryman," Bellow has noted, "once told me that T.S.Eliot could no longer read the daily paper. 'It was too *exciting*,' he said."[13] It is doubly ironic that Charlie's contribution to this state of horrible, empty excitement should be on the subject of 'Boredom'. But, since 'it is the business of the cultural intelligentsia [...] to produce such chatter",[14] perhaps Charlie was only doing his job!

Returning to his problems over the value of the self, however, we find that Citrine, despite desiring to be relieved of the pressures of such a self, is, like Sammler,

appalled by the falseness of the modern personality, quoting Schumpeter's view that "when people think they are being so subtly inventive or creative [in the domain of the self] they merely reflect society's general need for economic growth"[269]. Charlie again turns to Steiner for help in resolving his dilemma (here is an instance where philosophical speculation tends to supplant the action of the novel), being at one and the same time tired with selfhood and 'bored' with "the lack of *personal* connection with the external world"[202]. Clearly Steiner's programme to unify the worlds of internal and external reality might assist in the latter (though one must bear in mind the earlier warning about the nature of external reality). Charlie sees a way out, though, in the distinction made by Steiner, and modulated by Charlie, between the "Consciousness soul"and the "Imaginative soul". The former is the false actor of the self, trapped in the fallen state:-

> In the arbitrary division between Subject and Object the world has been lost. The zero self sought diversion. It became an actor. This was the situation of the Consciousness Soul as I interpreted it.[281]

This is the quotidian, everyday self, denied access to higher worlds. It is the state in which most people exist. Charlie, however, through Steiner, aspires to the "Imaginative Soul", which appears to be a convenient storehouse where Citrine can place his disparate concepts of a genuine self unified with nature, and the loss of self in a Joseph-like "colony of the spirit", and mould them together by means of the redemptive power of the imagination - of Art. Charlie adumbrates this aim after re-reading one of Humboldt's last poems:-

> The imagination must not pine away - that was Humboldt's message. It must assert again that art manifests the inner powers of nature.[112]

and again, during another memory of his deceased teacher:-

Is it true that as big-time knowledge advances poetry must drop behind, that the imaginative mode of thought belongs to the childhood of the race? [...] It's rather our minds that have allowed themselves to be convinced that there is no imaginative power to connect every individual to the creation independently.[364]

As he gropes toward apprehension of the "Imaginative Soul", he berates Renata with his ideas:-

The greatest things, the things most necessary for life, have recoiled and retreated. People are actually dying of this, losing all personal life, and the inner well-being of millions, many many millions, is missing [...] I admit this private sphere has become so repulsive that we are glad to get away from it. But we accept the disgrace ascribed to it [...] Mankind must recover its imaginative powers, recover living thought and real being, no longer accept these insults to the soul, and do it soon. Or else![250]

until he finally settles on his mission:-

The job, once and for all, was to burst from the fatal self-sufficiency of consciousness and put my remaining strength over into the Imaginative Soul. As Humboldt too should have done.[417]

But as Charlie moves along the path toward putative salvation, two things become clear. First, if Charlie's self can exist only in a higher state (which of necessity can be accessible only to initiates of Steiner), then no matter how glorious this state may be, he is in danger of cutting off his nose to spite his face, by lapsing into a dangerous exclusivity of being. And second, the desire for fraternity which would act as a check upon this danger, the need to arouse Mankind from its torpor (Citrine at one point describes himself as the herald of the "saviour faculty" Imagination[396]) and elevate humanity to the higher plane, is constructed on the same basis as was Mr.Sammler's urge for brotherhood. For although Charlie believes that "there was a core of the eternal in every human being"[438-439], and that "these matters of spirit are widely and instantly grasped"[91], his connections are forged in the knowledge that there is something inexpressible and nebulous

about them. His desire for unity, like that of his fictional predecessor, is an other-worldly one, culminating as it does in the vision of a transcendent pool of souls. Granted, these souls are supposed to return every so often to this world, but when they do the connection seems lost, conditions prove hostile to a maintenance of the bond. Charlie, after Baudelaire, is stimulated by the notion that "Real life was a relationship between *here* and *there*"[460]. Perhaps so. But as Charlie spins between the two realms of this world and the higher world, it becomes evident that his deepest wants cannot be fully realised in *either*. So Ben Siegel's view, with particular regard to this novel, that the author's characters "reassert Bellow's unflagging humanism"[15] is not quite true, for the requisite ingredients for a humanist view belong in this instance outside the realm of the human. Michael Glenday, though, is clearly wrong to say that the novel "express[es] Bellow's conviction that 'real life' can only be sustained by deploying strategies of withdrawal from *la vie quotidienne*".[16] For Charlie does no such thing. In his conviction that real life was a connection between here and there, that "the dead and the living still formed one community"[405], Charlie is shrewd enough to know that "this planet was still the base of operations"[405]. And even though we leave Charlie after he has been jilted by Renata, there is nothing to suggest that he will not continue in his insatiable lust, nor indeed in his involvement with the "moronic inferno", in the machinations of such as Cantabile. For despite everything, Charlie's immersion in the fallen world is quite an enjoyable experience for him, and if his Steineresque visions prove to be groundless, then he is certainly not going to turn monastic in this world! Charlie is right in one sense - the sense that he cannot slough off the burden of selfhood *in this world* - and that same sense will ensure that withdrawal from the world is not an option.

The ending is typically ambiguous and uneasy. From the money accrued from the selling of the old screenplay co-authored by Charlie and Humboldt, Charlie determines to give Humboldt a decent reburial. In an ironic echo of this film treatment, Charlie's is an act of atonement similar to that of the film's main character, who makes public repentance of his earlier misdeeds (the similarity does not end there - the film's main character became a cannibal, whilst Charlie had metaphorically cannibalised Humboldt's character to use as material for his Broadway hit). The poignancy of this final scene is undermined by a threatening combination of the presence of bulldozers employed to fashion Humboldt's new resting-place (in many ways reminiscent of the yellow dinosaur steamshovels, vanguards of a deathly technology, of Lowell's 'For the Union Dead') and Charlie's horrific vision as he sees a concrete block being lowered over Humboldt's coffin:-

> So the coffin was enclosed and the soil did not come directly upon it. But then, how did one get out? One didn't, didn't, didn't! You stayed, you stayed! [...] Thus the condensation of collective intelligences and combined ingenuities [...] dealt with the individual poet.[487]

Yet the horror of this is mitigated by the appearance of the crocus at the burial-ground, a small spark of hope and transcendence, a counter-point to the overtones of terrible finality. Is it Humboldt's "Imaginative Soul" triumphantly resurfacing? As Bellow himself had pointed out earlier, we should not perhaps scoff at things we cannot explain. Charlie leaves us with just such a sense of mystery:-

> The fact is, I suspect, that we occupy a point within a great hierarchy that goes far beyond ourselves. The ruling premises deny this. We feel suffocated and don't know why. The existence of a soul is beyond proof under the ruling premises, but people go on behaving as though they had souls, nevertheless. They behave as if they came from another place, another life, and they have impulses and desires that nothing in this world, none of our present premises , can account for.[479]

Charlie, like the rest of us, must wait for the intervention of the ultimate arbiter to determine the validity of his vision.

References.

The epigraphs are, respectively:-

Plato: *The Republic*, 'The Immortality of the Soul'; Penguin Classics, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, 1955, p444.

Bellow Saul: 'The Sealed Treasure', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 1 July, 1960, p414.

1 Bradbury, Malcolm: 'The It and the We: Saul Bellow's New Novel', *Encounter*, November 1975, pp61-67, (p61).

2 Rodrigues: *Q.F.T.H.*, p226.

3 Wilson: *O.B.P.*, p171.

4 Shattuck, Roger: 'A Higher Selfishness', *New York Review of Books*, 18 September, 1975, pp21-25, (p22,25).

5 Newman, Charles: 'Lives of the Artists', *Harpers*, October 1975, pp82-83,85 (p82).

6 Bellow, Saul: *Humboldt's Gift*, Penguin Books, London, England,1976, (originally published in UK. by Martin Secker & Warburg Ltd., 1975) p107. All subsequent page references appear in the text.

7 *Knowledge of Higher Worlds and its Attainment.*

8 Clayton, in the second edition of *In Defense of Man*, ,1979, p309; cited in Glenday, *S.B.D.H.*, p143.

9 Bellow, Saul: 'Starting out in Chicago', *American Scholar* 44 (1974-75), p77.

10 An examination of any of the persons who thought themselves to be twentieth-century embodiments of this Hegelian concept shows just how much *acting* is involved in the role.

11 Epstein, Joseph: 'A Talk with Saul Bellow', *New York Times Book Review*, 5 December, 1976, p93.

12 Botsford, Keith: ,Saul Bellow: Made in America', *The Independent*, 10 February, 1990.

13 Bellow, Saul: 'A World Too Much with Us', *Critical Inquiry*, Autumn 1975, p3.

14 Bellow, Saul: 'Interview with Myself', *New Review* 2.18, (1975) p54.

15 Siegel, Ben: 'Artists and Opportunists in Saul Bellow's *Humboldt's Gift*', *Contemporary Literature*, Spring 1978, reprinted in Trachtenberg, *C.E.S.B.*, pp158-172 (p158).

16 Glenday: *S.B.D.H.*, p124.

## Chapter Nine

### *The Dean's December* - Out, Out and Away.

"From their side, looking at us in the West, they must be struck by our innocence, our apparent ignorance of the main facts, our self-indulgent playing about with ideological toys, our reckless rocking of the boat. They must also wonder as well about the dull refractory minds, the sleepiness of many of us. For one part of mankind is in prison [...] and those of us who are free and fed are not awake. What will it take to rouse us?"

Saul Bellow.

"It is only from within that the outer world itself can be studied. We ourselves, individually, are the only Knowers of its qualities - Qualities which, as matters stand, we are not nowadays educated to grasp [...] That world is one described by a most intelligent friend of mine as a world of outsides without insides."

Saul Bellow

Bellow was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1976, a year after the publication of *Humboldt's Gift*. Since that novel has been characterised by one critic as the author's "Mount Everest",[1] the award might have seemed to constitute 'official' recognition that Bellow had, to use the unavoidable pun, reached the peak of his fictional powers. However, to use an even more unavoidable pun, the author was piqued by suggestions that the only way for him to go now was down. No one was more alive to the inherent perils of his newly-won status than Bellow himself:-

As a Nobel Prize winner one could become, if one is not careful, a cultural functionary, to be trundled out in honorific robes whenever the occasion requires.[2]

- a fate somewhat reminiscent of that of Charlie in *Humboldt's Gift*! To his eternal credit, however, Bellow refused to be pensioned off and become a dreadful media 'personality'. Instead, he produced possibly the most provocative and contentious novel of his career. As he explained in discussing his new work:-

I felt that it would be wrong of me simply to wrap myself up in my honours and lie down quietly. I couldn't bear the thought of that. The cliché about anyone who has won the Nobel Prize is that he has shot his bolt, he's finished, he's ready to bite the dust, nothing more will come from his pen or his typewriter. I defied that particular

prejudice. I didn't defy it defiantly, I defied it quietly, because I thought it was nonsensical. But there are a great many people who had their pieces already prepared: bye bye Bellow. I didn't oblige them by biting the dust - at least I don't think I did. I'm going to be under fire until I am a reverend senior, if I live long enough to join the Robert Frost category.[3]

and:-

My intention in this book was to be hard, to abandon rhetorical flourishes and keep myself to direct statement. I don't think I've ever written a book with so many simple declarative sentences. The idea was to hit and to hit hard, to make sure that every stroke of the hammer would tell.[4]

The result was *The Dean's December*, a book which "they're not going to be able to shrug [...] off, though there are some very powerful shruggers around."[5] For it is indeed a hard-hitting novel. In its twin settings of Chicago and Bucharest, Bellow has provided some of the most vivid, grim and often brutal description of his artistic life. The crumbling slums and appalling deprivation of certain parts of his native city contrast with the deadening and grotesque uniformity of Ceaucescu's Rumania. And in the spindly, reserved figure of Albert Corde, variously described as a "hungry observer",[6] "temperamentally an image man"[22] and "objectivity (no, impartiality) intoxicated"[163], we are provided with the typical Bellovian means not only for the recording of such information, but also for the adumbration of its implications. Corde is at once a paradoxical figure in that he is one of the mildest and most inoffensive of Bellow's central characters, who nevertheless is surrounded by much horror and chaos (and indeed he seems to provoke some of the chaos thanks to the excoriating articles he has just penned on Chicago's decay). Moreover, many critics have not been at all enamoured of Corde, due to the impression that he is, like Citrine, a rather tentative presence around which to base events. There is a certain amount of justice in Jonathan Wilson's complaint that Corde is "something of a cipher".[7] Dean Flower, though, goes too far when he claims that "Corde embarrassed by his writing (but not really)

becomes Bellow apologising (but not really) for his 'high-mindedness', admitting that his novel is weighed down with 'philosophising' when it should have given 'straight narrative'". Flower further contends that this is part of a devious authorial strategy "designed to make the reader see the virtue in tedious 'high-mindedness' and to forget that crude desire for plot".[8] What *is* undeniable is that *The Dean's December* continues and advances the post-*Herzog* trend in Bellow's novels of the gradual polarisation of ideas and action. The declarative sentences the author mentioned earlier can often appear as if *in relief* from the main pattern of events. But it would be unfair to view Corde as merely an adjunct to ideas, or as an unsuccessful sop to the form of the novel. For although the force of the declarative narrative exerts a major influence on our reactions to the book, Corde's interjections of rhetorical flourish and argumentation serve to underline that the novel is not *all* philosophical polemic. Though the finer points of characterisation *can* be muffled on occasion, the fictional 'dangling' man at the centre of things is essential to Bellow's art.

I would advance two more reasons for Corde's quality of 'not-thereness'. First, Bellow seems to have borrowed a fair amount from his own personality and experiences to animate Corde.[9] This is not to say that Corde does not suffer from ironic treatment at the hands of his creator, for he most certainly does. But what it does mean is that many critics consequently felt that they were being subjected to a sociological lecture given not by Corde, but by Bellow. Accordingly, much of the reaction to the novel centres on the differing perceptions of whether it is an imaginative exercise or a straightforward authorial essay. So while Salman Rushdie lauds the book as "astoundingly well-written" and "thrillingly ambitious",[10] Jonathan Wilson sees it as the "least successful" and "surely the bleakest novel in the canon".[11] And, unable to see beyond the purely 'political' ramifications, Diane Johnson castigates Bellow for giving us "a lie at the heart of the book [...] in assuming or pretending that

there would be a great public reaction to objective descriptions of American social conditions".[12] Such a blasé attitude as this last could only come from the professionally smart and cynical. And in any case, it misses the point entirely. For although the images of chaos engendered by an obscene and lurid poverty are memorably ghastly (indeed, only the insistently worldly could fail to be shocked by the implications of such as the Spofford Mitchell case), the real thrust of the novel, and certainly of Corde's attention, is directed to addressing the *spiritual* indigence of the city's inhabitants, towards confronting "the slum of innermost being, of which the inner city was perhaps a material representation"[199]. This is, after all, the second of those reasons which account for the tenuous nature of the character of Corde. For he, like every Bellow hero from Herzog onwards, is more and more drawn away from the corporeal, away from a bludgeoning reality and towards the spiritual - and thus the solidity of his representation is weakened. As was noticed with Moses, Sammler and Charlie, this desire will remain unfulfillable - just as it will in this case. But it is little surprise that, faced with the drabness and inertia of Communist Bucharest on the one side, and the demoniac and whirling fury of Chicago on the other, Corde's instinct is to gravitate toward the object of his astronomer wife's studies - to move out, out and away.

Corde, like others in the Bellow canon, has a remarkable propensity to find himself mired in dangerous situations. Described as "an executive" - "wasn't a college dean a kind of executive?"[7] - he is embroiled in a battle with radical students (who receive a hideously familiar embodiment in the form of Corde's nephew, the pasty and distracted Mason, the white man who feels that he alone among white men can relate to the problems of Chicago's 'superfluous' black population) over the alleged murder of a white student by a black pimp and his whore. By posting a reward for information leading to the arrest of the suspects, Corde has made himself the target for all kinds of

opprobrium from 'progressive' elements. As if that were not enough, he is the subject of much vituperation and scorn over the articles he has published, zealously attacking the state of his native city - the slums, the squalid and haphazard violence, the nightmarish turmoil of the prisons, the corruption of the local government 'machine', and the corruption of language and information by the media. Not really a *proper* dean nor a *proper* journalist, Corde is now in the Rumanian capital to attend to his dying mother-in-law. Away from the place where "it was open season on Corde"[63], he is given the opportunity to try to make some sense of his views, both of himself and of the direction of human affairs. In this enterprise, Bellow shows the dangling man at his most naked and exposed.

On the most fundamental level, the differences between Chicago and Bucharest are evident to Corde, as to everyone. These are the basic differences between a totalitarian and a democratic system of government. The dreary oppressiveness of tyranny takes on a dark and threatening character, as an almost animalistic force of extinction:-

> Here, as everywhere in Bucharest, the light was inadequate. They were short on energy in Rumania - something about subnormal rainfall and low water in all the dams. That's right, blame nature. December brown set in about three in the afternoon. By four it had climbed down the stucco of old walls, the gray of Communist residential blocks: brown darkness took over the pavements, and then came back again from the pavements more thickly and isolated the street lamps. These were feebly yellow in the impure melancholy winter effluence. Air sadness, Corde called this. In the final stage of dusk, a brown sediment seemed to encircle the lamps. Then there was a livid death movement. Night was very different here, thought Albert Corde.[9]

The scarcity of material goods and even basic foodstuffs in the East contrasts sharply with the plenitude of availability (in theory, at least) in the Capitalist West. Moreover, there is a shortage of mental stimuli behind the iron curtain, in opposition to the terrible proliferation of information outlets in the United States:-

Corde said, 'At the Intercontinental I saw nothing but *Pravda* and *Tribuna Ludu*. They don't seem to carry the *Herald Tribune*.' But he was really in two minds about the news. At home he read too many papers. He was better off without his daily dose of world botheration, sham happenings, without newspaper phrases. Nothing true - really true - could be said in the papers. In the dining room there was a huge short-wave radio which looked as if it could reach Java but gave only jamming squeals. The big TV with its wooden cowl was equally useless. On it you saw nobody but the dictator. He inspected, reviewed, greeted, presided; and there were fanfares, flowers and limousines. People were shown applauding. But if emigration were permitted, the country would be empty in less than a month.

It is doubly ironic that to be the possessor of 'information' is of vital importance in a despotic world of suspicion and spying networks. But perhaps more disturbing than the overt differences which Corde finds between the societies are the underlying *similarities*. For beneath the surface he senses a sinister and cynical mutuality:-

Where the Communists saw class war, civil war, pictures of catastrophe, we saw only temporary aberrations. Capitalistic democracies could never be at home with the catastrophe outlook. We are used to peace and plenty, we are for everything nice and against cruelty, wickedness, craftiness, monstrousness. Worshippers of progress, its dependents, we are unwilling to reckon with villainy and misanthropy, we reject the *horrible* [...] Our outlook requires the assumption that each of us is at heart trustworthy, each of us is naturally decent and wills the good [...] Modern businessmen and politicians, if they are going to give billions in credit to the other side, don't want to think of an epoch of wars and revolutions. They need to think about contractual stability, and therefore assume the basic seriousness of the authorities in Communist countries - their counterparts, officials, practical people like themselves, but with different titles.[197-198]

The two systems (or rather, those at the head of the two systems) ultimately rely on the stability of the other for their economic benefit. The horrifying corollary of this, of which Corde is only too well aware, is that large sections of humanity are viewed as economically expendable. The only difference is that while one side incorporates this view into its philosophy of government, the other, as Corde says, rejects the *horrible* - or more accurately, ignores it:-

Well, they set the pain level for you over here. The government has the power to set it. Everybody has to understand this monopoly and be prepared to accept it. At home, in the West, it's different. America is never going to take an open position on the pain level, because it's a pleasure society, a pleasure society that likes to think of itself as a tenderness society. A tender liberal society has to find soft ways to institutionalize harshness and smooth it over compatibly with progress, buoyancy. So that with us when people are merciless, when they kill, we explain that it's because they're disadvantaged, or have lead poisoning, or come from a backward section of the country, or need psychological treatment. Over here the position was scarcely concealed that such and such numbers were going to be expended. In Russia, for the building of socialism, that policy was set by Lenin from the first. He would have allowed millions to die in the early famines. More would have died in the early years if the kindly Red Cross and Herbert Hoover hadn't distributed food. Even with us, conservative capitalism has to temper or conceal its position that classic conditions of competition will bring suffering and death.[271-72]

In Rumania the individual is sacrificed on the altar of Marxist 'progress', the human being lacks absolute value. In America the wretched are assigned to a ruined category and glossed over. The victims in Chicago are the black 'underclass', a problem which, as Bellow has articulated, is only too real:-

You can't live in Chicago without being sharply aware of the presence of this underclass. It is a source of disorder in the city. The crime rate is very high. The streets are not only unsafe but have acquired a barbarous character [...] what has happened, in effect, is that you have a mass of people in America's cities who have become, for technological reasons, superfluous. Nobody knows what to do with them. They don't know what to with and about themselves [...] What we are looking at is a doomed population, one which has no visible prospects of survival. Billions of dollars have been spent mostly on bureaucracies appointed to deal with these problems, and they have utterly failed to do so. They have simply failed. Matters grow worse, not better.[13]

Corde himself is horrified when Mason confronts him with the brutal logic of the powers that be:-

The blacks on food stamps, they're the *underclass* - that's what your sociologists around here call them. They're hoping that drugs and killings and prison will eliminate the lousy trouble-making underclass.[39]

And is similarly affected when reformed drug-addict Winthrop avers:-

'I'm telling you, Professor, that the few who find us and many hundred of thousand more who never do and never will - they're marked out to be destroyed. Those are the people next to die, Sir. That's what we're looking at.'[191]

The significance of these ideas both for Corde, and for this present study, lie in the implications they possess for a humanistic interpretation of the world. Corde can no more alleviate the plight of his fellow creatures than fly in the air. What he *can* do, is to do what Bellow suggests he does:-

That is to say, if you call yourself a 'humanist', you cannot permit yourself to do this without a real review of the facts of life. You are obliged to see them at their worst. You cannot afford to mitigate them.[14]

Does this entail a 'humanism' which acknowledges that some people are incapable of enlightenment? Corde certainly does not shrink from a confrontation with, and a painfully detailed description of, the 'facts of life' as he sees them. But in his eagerness to alert people to such things, he not only adopts such a fervent, indignant and preachy stance as to repel his readers (he "sounded like the Reverend Jones of Jonestown"[243]), merely adding to the swirl of apocalypses in which the general public was "marinated"[141], but he also proves to be ill-equipped as a public 'communicator', recording his reactions to the horrors he sees in terms of the "soul","imagination" and "the slums we carry around inside us. Every man's *inner* inner city"[205]. For a public steeped in politics and current-event fatigue, guided by the euphemistic gravy of the prose of such as Spangler over the depredations of spiritual life, such intensely personal terms are strictly off-limits. Thus the furore surrounding his articles. Corde's intention is certainly noble:-

He [Corde] thinks that human beings don't grasp what is not forcefully expressed: that is to say, that we have found a language or languages to mask these things (the worst facts of life) from us because it is our desire to conceal them [...] The need for clearly stated truth is like the need for bread to eat or water to drink [...] People who have

truly grown up reading the great books of the tradition feel how necessary it is that someone should write now as to furnish [...] the edible bread and the drinkable water. That is why Corde is in such a ferment, almost in a frenzy. It has struck him that there is no way to transmit these things any more, that the world is beyond shock...[15]

but his readers are not prepared for the shock of his 'literary' style. And this is where Corde falls down as a humanist. Quite apart from the fact that his inclination is towards the intangibles of the spirit, he specifically rejects the idea of being cast as a "humanist intellectual", comparing the latter to "the Ruling Reptiles of the Mesozoic"[137]. It is Spangler who, for all his confusion, correctly identifies that Corde is not *programmatic* but deeply *personal* in his convictions: "...the Dean has no bent for such enterprises. He is not a man for models, he is a sensitive and emotional private observer"[295]. So sensitive, in fact, that he can recognise an element of distasteful truth about himself as he listens to Mason's diatribe:-

The Dean understood only too well what the kid was transmitting when he said, "Appalled'? 'All shook up"?' He was saying, Let's not fuck around with these high sentiments and humane teachings and pieties and poetry, and the rest of that jazz. You keep going back to the knife and the gag and the blood and the corpse and the prostrated wife [the details of the murder of the white student]. And you do it to stir yourself with horror. Stones advertising how 'human' they are.
The truth of this, even if it was not more than a particle, was a poisonous particle.[46]

Though such self-deprecation is more than a little harsh, Corde can recognise the grain of truth in this judgment because he is not a 'humanist' in any rational, systematic or prescriptive sense. Rather he is a man who most effectively functions when dealing with the spiritual qualities , as he sees them, of specific individuals - what he calls the "depth-level" of a person [93] - an underlying reality wherein emotional bonds are the potentially unifying force. The depth-level remains latent because it is, as its name suggests, obscured beneath many layers of spurious mental consciousness. And because Corde, in his articles, must at least to some extent deal in public currency (the problems of society), when he speaks in terms of the spirit it strikes a discordant note,

and invites only ridicule and suggestions of crankiness - simply because the matters of the spirit themselves lie at the depth-level, and can only be approached through private cultivation and not through public forum. Importantly, though, what is most pertinently revealed to Corde during his stay in Bucharest is that the 'depth-level' there seems to be much more apparent than in the United States. He finds that there exists a dignity and genuineness of feeling for each other in the East, a feeling which is unspoken but nevertheless powerfully acknowledged by all. This is particularly evident to Corde in the form of "the woman connection"[131], a matriarchy which consists of his wife's relations, who operate on "the old discipline"[131], ensuring the maintenance of the deepest emotional kinships in the face of a regime which attempts to extinguish them. These bonds seem genuine *because* they must needs be kept private. Corde does not kid himself over the reasons for this purity of feeling: "On the other side, it's the archaic standard, Oriental and despotic, affliction accepted as the ground of existence, its real basis"[272]. The existence of suffering and hardship actually engenders this purity, as a sort of spiritual antidote to material rigours. And though he bears the proviso of State repression in mind, Corde cannot help but compare what he sees in Rumania with the false consciousness of the West:-

> In America the emotions were different somehow, perhaps thinner. Here you led a crypto-emotional life in the shadow of the Party and the State. You had no personal rights, but on the other hand, the claims of feeling were more fully acknowledged. [76-77]

The rights of feeling in the East are contrasted with the West, where any number of material rights are possessed, but there exists a hideous politicized consciousness where the private human being ought to be. And this is a consciousness which is far from suppressed, being rather a whirling madness given free play to a crazy, uncontrollable extent, so that, whilst some are better able to resist infection by this "information sickness"[16] than others, no one can really escape. So even Corde, who

can identify the symptoms, is nevertheless prone to them, in that "he read too many articles and books"[26] and "gathered too many associations"[98]. The essential contrast is between the flimsy and irrelevant nature of this public information and the *real* knowledge needed to develop the individual spirit. The grotesque embodiment of modern public consciousness is of course Dewey Spangler, the culmination of those eccentric and overloaded figures which began with Tamkin in *Seize the Day*. "In the privileged democracies," comments Bellow, "we find people who force politics on themselves."[17] Spangler, the syndicated journalist whose idol is Walter Lippmann, is the great satisfier of the demand "to know what's happening to *us*".[18] Bellow has described his type in interview:-

> They're extremely influential people and they are opinion-makers and even celebrities, and at the same time frivolous, irresponsible and silly, many of them. They are sources of information for the modern world [...] They are really the creators of public excitement and distraction. They are the people who make all nations feel they are in the act - while what there really is is a chaotic mess of distractions which makes information impossible. It's all too silly [...] It doesn't tell you anything that you need to know. It keeps up a sort of daily fever. It's show business.[19]

And Corde sees Spangler as the deceiver, the debaser of private experience:-

> Spangler, the world-communicator, was a maker of discourse (increasing the debris of false description). Twice weekly, readers all over the U.S. picked up their fresh thick newspapers and turned to Spangler's column to tune up their thinking on world affairs, to correct their pitch.[241]

Moreover:-

> The great public, the consumer of his views, didn't require him to take any ground. He needed only to keep talking. He lived (although Corde doubted that such tension should be called living) in a kind of event-glamour, among the deepest developments of the times, communicating what most concerned serious and responsible opinion. To Corde there was something bogus and grotesque about this. It was only 'modern public consciousness.' There was no real experience in it, none whatsoever. The forms that made true experience were corrupted.[123]

And in a passage which demonstrates why Corde failed to make any headway with his articles:-

In touch with the Sadats and the Kissingers, the Brezhnevs and the Nixons, interpreting them to the world, Dewey was a master of the public forms of discourse. If you were going to be a communicator, you had to know the passwords, the code words, you had to signify your acceptance of the prevailing standards. You could say nothing publicly, not if you expected to be taken seriously, without the right clearance.[296]

This flurry of neurotic and ultimately fatuous 'information' produces a sense of disordered excitement in an audience, each and everyone of whom feel the necessity of having an *opinion* on matters of public 'concern':-

It isn't true that people are unsophisticated in the United States: they are barbarously sophisticated. I think that would be a much more correct way to put it. They know all kinds of things they have learned from press and TV, from watching panel discussions. They've picked up psychological, anthropological, sociological, political jargon. They are simply abuzz with ideas or the simulacra of ideas, so that if you try to assume that you are dealing with a lay public which has no ideas, I think you're quite mistaken.[20]

The sumptuous gabble of Spangler's article in which he apparently betrays his old friend Corde out of "*gaieté de coeur*"[21] shows how the public can be affected in the foregoing way - and why their exposure to the mass communications technique of the likes of Spangler renders them insensible to the personalised appeals of Corde. Spangler, as Jonathan Wilson rightly points out, "is the true instance of the Decline of the West"[22] - not so much an artist-politician as a political philophaster. And yet, for all that, Spangler's summation of Corde's position is very accurate and concise:-

'Professor Corde,' Dewey went on, 'is very hard on journalism, on the mass media. His charge is that they fail to deal with the moral, emotional imaginative life, in short, the *true* life of human beings, and that their great power prevents people from having access to this true life. What we call "information" he would classify as delusion.'[296]

Whatever else he is, Spangler is no fool. Perhaps it is Corde who is foolishly naive, in his attempts to set himself up as "the moralist of seeing"[125]. In any case, there is a certain amount of pathos in the figure of Spangler, fumbling miserably with his colostomy bag. Corde also recalls "the original skinny, frantic, striving screeching Dewey" he had liked so much[115]. Spangler is certainly a much more sympathetic figure than Corde's lawyer cousin, Max Detillion, a latter-day Selah Tarrant whose lust for publicity - "a moronic genius for getting attention"[64] - is actuated by the belief that as long as he remains in the public eye, his erotic life can be extended (Mysteriously, there are unsubstantiated hints about Corde's own sexual madness - "erotic instability"[15], and "sexual offences"[133], mean that he was "supposed to have been a wild ladies' man"[83]. Since there is nothing to substantiate these charges, further weight is lent to the suspicion of a degree of autobiography). What the examples of Spangler and Detillion essentially reveal, however, is that in the ostensible land of the free, the *un*free, politicized consciousness holds greater and greater sway. Whilst in the ostensibly politicized East, it is the qualities of personal concern which struggle to the surface. Corde, though, is ultimately unable to choose between what *either* society manifests:-

> When we've worn ourselves out with our soft nihilism, the Russians would like to arrive with their hard nihilism. They feel humanly superior. [...] They say, "We haven't got justice or personal freedom but we do have warmth, humanity, brotherhood, and our afflictions have given us some character. All you can offer us is supermarkets." Whereas the best defence that liberal democracy can make goes like this: "True, we're short on charisma and fraternal love, although you have it in debased forms, don't kid yourself about that. What we do have in the West is a kind of rational citizens' courage which you don't understand in the least. At our best we can be patient, we keep our heads in crisis, we can be decent in a cold steady way. Don't underestimate us."[273]

Corde rejects both the suffering that is conditional in the former, and the spiritual emptiness conditional in the latter, based as it is on a shameless desire to perpetuate capitalism for its own sake. Thus it is that Corde turns away from public reality on

both sides of the Atlantic, and attempts to clarify his perspectives on the inner life, on the underlying reality of the soul.

Corde's attacks on 'real' reality certainly reflect to some degree Mason's charge that Corde excites himself with horror, for he has focused on the most appalling examples of this reality in order to hammer home his point regarding the spiritual paucity of the modern condition. In administering his "own Rorschach test to the U.S."[186], Corde had hoped to shatter the torpor of its citizens, to penetrate the general befuddlement with something more deep and lasting. He paints a picture of relentless chaos and decay. There is the ruin of the "stunned city" of Chicago: "many many square miles of civil Passchendaele or Somme"[204]. There are the twin hells of the anarchic prisons (a judge threatens a mentally retarded defendant with sodomy and torture therein - he accepts the brutality as read) and the dialysis unit at the county hospital, where the sick stare passively at the TV; and there are the seemingly ubiquitous acts of robbery, vandalism, rape, paederasty and murder. Corde "wrote about whirling souls and became a whirling soul himself, lifted up, caught up, spinning, streaming with passions, compulsive protests, inspirations"[192]. Small wonder that Corde is conscious of "a certain instability" on his part[197], and feels "his controls were not in dependable working order"[69]. Underlying all this mad agitation, Corde sees a paralysing fear, a fear resultant from the incomplete development of the person:-

> The advanced modern consciousness was a reduced consciousness inasmuch as it contained only the minimum of furniture that civilisation was able to install (practical judgements, bare outlines of morality, sketches, cartoons instead of human beings); and this consciousness, because its equipment was humanly so meager, so abstract, was basically murderous. It was for this reason that murder was easy to understand...[192]

In an echo of Charlie Citrine's Steineresque interests, Corde's view is that the "the horror is in the literalness [...] The literalness of bodies and their members - outsides

without insides"[203]. So, when this "earnest, brooding, heart-struck, time-ravaged person (or boob), with his moral desires [...] taking up the burden of mankind"[124] confronts this horror, he confronts it with the need, as he sees it, to reconstitute 'reality' in accordance with the deepest essentials of the soul - which, just as Spangler had outlined, constitute the moral, emotional and imaginative life, the true life of human beings:-

> In the American moral crisis, the first requirement was to experience what was happening and to see what must be seen. The facts were covered from our perception [...] The increase of theories and discourse [...] led to horrible distortions of public consciousness. Therefore, the first act of morality was to disinter the reality, retrieve reality, dig it out from the trash, represent it anew as art would represent it. So when Dewey talked about the 'poetry' [of Corde's articles], pouring scorn on it, he was right insofar as Corde only made 'poetic' gestures or passes, but not insofar as Corde was genuinely inspired. Insofar as he was inspired he had genuine political significance.[124-125]

and:-

> But perhaps Spangler's main charge against me was that I was guilty of poetry [...] He himself was keen on poetry in his youth. He's now a spokesman, though, and poets were never really liked in America [...] That's why when we have most need of the imagination we have only 'special effects' and histrionics. But for a fellow like me, the real temptation of abyssifying is to hope that the approach of the "last days" might be liberating, might compel us to reconsider deeply, earnestly. In these last days we have a right and even a duty to purge our understanding. In the general weakening of authority, the authority of the ruling forms of thought also is reduced, those forms which have done much to bring us into despair and into the abyss.[274]

Morality and feeling, for Corde, are implicit in the free play of the imagination, in the world that is recovered from beneath "the debris of false description or nonexperience"[240]. He cites in his articles a (somewhat unconvincing) example of how only poetry had the strength "to rival the attractions of narcotics, the magnetism of TV, the excitements of sex, or the ecstasies of destruction"[186-87], by noting the reaction of black schoolchildren to lines from *Macbeth* (apparently a 'dangerous' text

to the 'machine'). Nevertheless, Corde comes increasingly to believe that this inner experience is the only worthwhile 'reality':-

> This organic, constitutional, sensory oddity, in which Albert Corde's soul had a lifelong freehold, must be grasped as knowledge. He wondered what reality was if it wasn't this, or what you were 'losing' by death if not this. If it was only the literal world that was taken from you the loss was not great. Literal! What you didn't pass through your soul didn't even exist, that was what made the literal literal. Thus he had taken it upon himself to pass Chicago through his own soul. A mass of data, terrible, murderous. It was no easy matter to put such things through. But there was no other way for reality to happen. Reality didn't exist 'out there'. It began to be real only when the soul found its underlying truth.[262]

The drive into the self seems to have led Corde to intimations of other worlds - "If there was another world, this was the time for it to show itself. The visible one didn't bear looking at"[188] - into a yearning for deliverance, for a state where the soul can find the true expression of its vital properties. Corde is surrounded and oppressed throughout the novel by pointers of finality, renunciation and death. There are the actual deaths of Valeria and Rick Lester to contend with, in conjunction with Corde's own tendencies toward self-annihilation: he feels that "you might do worse than return to that strict zero-blue and simple ice. In all this Corde felt singularly close to the old woman"[108]; and he notes that "you could see it in every face, how the depleted wits fought their losing battle with death. Faces told you this. He had learned from his own face, and he confirmed the discovery by daily observations"[256]. It is these indicators which seem to precipitate his acceptance of the fact that the conditions of this world are too hostile to accommodate the rebirth of the soul, and feed the fires of his transcendent longings. Indeed, it may be wondered whether Corde is thrown into a deep self-hatred, because of the failure and the powerlessness of the qualities which he most cherishes - and that consequently he must escape from the limits of this self (certainly as Spangler interprets things, Corde's attacks on the falsity of humanistic

intellectuals encompass the author himself). In any case, Corde's ache for freedom is unmistakable:-

> Here in the Midwest there sometimes occurred the blues of Italian landscapes and he passed through them, very close to the borders of sense, as if he could do perfectly well without the help of his eyes, seeing what you didn't need human organs to see but experiencing as freedom and also as joy what the mortal person, seated there in his coat and gloves, otherwise recorded as colors, spaces, weights. This was different. It was like being poured out to the horizon, like a great expansion. What if death should be like this, the soul finding an exit. The porch rail was his figure for the hither side. The rest, beyond it, drew you constantly as the completion of your reality.[286]

The familiar problem for the Bellow hero is evident once more. The soul awakening can only be achieved by transplanting the spirit to *somewhere else*, beyond the domain of the human. And if Corde were to achieve a mystical satisfaction *in* the realm of the human, it would simply entail a collapse into the self, into an utterly impenetrable isolation. In any case, what Corde receives are *intimations* of spiritual breakthrough, never a consummation. So if Corde finds public reality repellent (and there are, after all, aspects of this he finds rather enjoyable), he knows that but for transient glimpses, the deepest gratification of the soul's existence must be confined to the further side - wherever that may be. He remains, and will remain, in a state of constant and troubled oscillation.

With the possible exception of Charlie, though, Corde is the only protagonist to be offered a substantial way to mitigate his dangling - indeed to end altogether his "crawling between heaven and earth"[221]. This comes in the form of the theory of the geophysicist Beech. This latter propounds the notion that the presence of lead in the water supply, in the food chain, in society as a whole - as a result of three centuries of unchecked industrial growth - is causing mankind to degenerate into "an inferior hominid"[141]:-

Chronic lead insult now affects all mankind. Biological dysfunctions, now observable in the most advanced populations, must be considered among the causes of wars and revolutions. Mental disturbances resulting from lead poison are reflected in terrorism, barbarism, crime, cultural degradation. Visible everywhere are the irritability, emotional instability, general restlessness, reduced acuity of the reasoning powers the difficulty of focusing, et cetera, which the practiced clinician can readily identify [...] We couldn't ourselves observe the dulling of consciousness since we were all its victims, and we would be dulled down into the abyss unaware that we were sinking.[140]

Being one of the few people impressed by the fervour of Corde's Chicago articles, Beech now wants the latter to bring the problem of lead insult to the attention of the public. Both men have reached similar conclusions about the general chaos, although they operate on differing premises. But now, with Beech's 'hard' (and therefore respectable) science being backed up by Corde's moral imperatives, there seems a chance of effecting Corde's dream of "the reunion of spirit and nature"[124]. As Corde articulates the proposal: "I must go back to the classroom and learn what it's all about - really. When I've understood the beauty and morality contained in the laws of science, I can take part in the decisive struggle - begin to restore the strength of Humanism"[225-26]. This declaration, though, seems incongruous coming from the man who, even though we accept that his attacks were not on Humanism *per se*, but on the falsity of Humanist intellectuals, nevertheless gives every indication of moving not in the direction of a cultural humanism, but towards a mystical spiritualism. And indeed it is this tendency that seems to overturn the possibility of a reconciliation between science and soul. For although we are still unsure, at the close of the novel, whether Corde will agree to act as Beech's literary partner, the signs are that he will not. For although Corde notes that Beech had become "a burning moral visionary" without being aware of it [140], he ultimately cannot accept the *material* cause for the nervous stupefaction as valid, wondering "whether 'lead' is just what Professor Beech has fixed upon but stands for something else that we all sense"[222]:-

Where Beech sees poison lead, I see poison thought or poison theory. The view we hold of the material world may put us into a case as heavy as lead, a sarcophagus which nobody will even have the art to paint becomingly. The end of philosophy and of art will do to 'advanced' thought what flakes of lead paint or leaded exhaust fumes do to infants.[225]

Though Corde deals in the constituents of humanist culture, he sees them as catalysts to a complete spiritual overhaul - an overhaul which, as was mentioned, appears to be only achievable outwith the limits of the human. What Corde has done is to blur the boundaries between Humanism and Transcendentalism to such a degree that he is able to speak longingly of the "power to cancel everything merely human"[305]. In his insistence on seeing contemporary maladies as having a spiritual base, his desires continue to gravitate in the one direction - away from the scientific, away from the human. Thus his declaration of a new sense of "equilibrium", of "coming into his own"[279], and his claim that "his tensions [were] kept in place"[306] seem doubtful propositions - simply because his desires will remain unattainable, and be continually pressed from behind by unacceptable reality. So Corde is not in equilibrium but in flux. Similarly, his talk of an "old self"[279] is just as flawed - and just as flawed as that of Joseph in *Dangling Man* - he is no more content with his earthly station than before, just as his moral outlook and devotion to his wife remain unchanged on the other side. The fact that Corde remains a dangling man is shown in the final scene of the novel. Everything in this scene points to a desire to escape, to transcend, as Corde moves up into the roof of the observatory to gaze at the stars: "If this present motion were to go on, you would travel straight out. You would go up into the stars"[305-06]. And as Corde stands entranced by these stars, he experiences a glorious epiphany:-

Here the living heavens looked as if they would take you in [...] And what he saw with his real eyes was not even the real heavens. No, only the white marks, bright vibrations, clouds of sky roe, tokens of the real thing, only as much as could be taken in through the distortions of the atmosphere. Through these distortions you saw objects, forms, partial realities. The rest was to be felt. And it wasn't only that you felt, but that you were drawn to feel and to penetrate further, as if you were being

informed that what was being spread over you had to do with your existence, down to the very blood and the crystal forms inside your bones. Rocks, trees, animals, men and women, these also drew you to penetrate further under the distortions (comparable to the atmospheric ones, shadows within shadows), to find their real being with your own. This was the sense in which you were drawn.[306]

But the vision's glory is matched only by its brevity. Only the balloons Corde had earlier released at his sister's party are able to move relentlessly towards the stars. Escape for Corde is impossible. He must return to the ground once again. No doubt he "mind[s] coming down more" than he minds the cold[307], but it is something he must do. "The cosmos", as it always has been, "was beyond him"[19]. The desire to enter it may be stronger, but the results are the same. Corde stays caught between the heavens and the earth, obsessed by both, possessed by neither. Michael Glenday's view that "to cancel out the human is for Corde, after all he has discovered about its purblind nature and its deep seated morbidity of mind, a manumission and enlightenment"[23] misses the mark. Perhaps it very well *might* have proved an enlightenment - but since the cancellation of the human is an impossible aim, Corde continues with, as Gabriel Josipovici neatly puts it, "a foot in the stockyard and an eye on the stars".[24] But as Corde stands, in equivocal supplication to the stars, the cold night air, so pleasing to him, contains dark hints of the coming ice...

References.

The epigraphs are, respectively,

Bellow, Saul: 'A World Too Much with Us', *Critical Enquiry*, Autumn 1975, p6

Below, Saul: 'A Writer from Chicago', *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values,* ed. Sterling M, McMurrin, Volu,e 3, Cambridge University Press, 1982, p217.

1 Rodrigues: *Q.F.T.H.*, p225.

2 Epstein, Joseph: 'A Talk with Saul Bellow', *New York Times Book Review,* 5 December, 1976, p3.

3 Bragg, Melvin: 'Saul Bellow talks about his new novel', *London Review of Books*, 6-19 May 1982, p22.

4 ibid, p22.

5 Kakutani, Michiko: 'A talk with Saul Bellow', *New York Times Book Review*, 13 December, 1981, p28.

6 Bellow, Saul: *The Dean's December*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, 1982, p14. All subsequent references cited in the text.

7 Wilson: *O.B.P.*, p32.

8 Flower, Dean: 'Fiction Chronicle', *Hudson Review*, 35.2, (1982), p284.

9 Corde's Rumanian astronomer wife, Minna, for instance, is based onBellow's fourth wife, Alexandra, a Rumanian mathetician.

10 Rushdie, Salman: 'The Big Match', *New Statesman*, 2 April, 1982, p22.

11 Wilson: *O.B.P.*, p29.

12 Johnson, Diane: 'Point of Departure', *New York Review of Books*, 4 March 1982, p6.

13 Bragg interview in *London Review of Books*, p22.

14 ibid, p22.

15 ibid, p22.

16 ibid, p22.

17 Bellow, Saul: 'A World Too Much with Us', p4.

18 Henry, Jim Douglas: 'Mystic Trade', *Listener*, 22 May, 1969, p706.

19 Bragg interview in *London Review of Books*, p22.

20 ibid,p22.

21 ibid, p22.

22 Wilson: *O.B.P.*, p34.

[23] Glenday: *S.B.D.H.*, p164.

[24] Josipovici,Gabriel: 'A Foot in the Stockyard and an Eye on the Stars', *Times Literary Supplement*, 2 April, 1982, p371.

## Chapter Ten

### *More Die of Heartbreak* - The Novaya Zemlya of the Soul.

"'But I can tell you, the goods folks still talk about Ethan Brand, in the village yonder, and what a strange errand took him away from his lime-kiln. Well, and so you have found the Unpardonable Sin?'

'Even so!' said the stranger, calmly.

'If the question is a fair one, proceeded Bartram, 'where might it be?'

Ethan Brand laid his finger on his own heart.

'Here!' replied he."

Hawthorne, *Ethan Brand.*

"The price you pay for the development of consciousness is the withering of the heart."

Saul Bellow.

With *More Die of Heartbreak*, Saul Bellow's novelistic career seems to have come to a full stop. Not through scarcity of invention, not even due to the advancing years, but rather thanks to what appears to be a profound exhaustion, both with the novelistic from itself, and with the world as it is represented in his own works. In the case of the former, and since the nineteen eighty seven publication of his tenth novel, Bellow has explicitly stated his disinclination to continue in this vein:-

> Yet we respond with approval when Chekhov tells us, 'Odd, I have now a mania for shortness. Whatever I read - my own or other people's works - it all seems to me not short enough.' I find myself emphatically agreeing with this [...] The reader will open his heart and mind to a writer who has understood this [...] Such a writer will trouble no one with his own vanities, will make no unnecessary gestures, indulge himself in no mannerisms, waste no reader's time. He will write as short as he can.[1]

The precise reasoning behind this change of heart can easily be conjectured by the post *Herzog* Bellow reader, and will be discussed in the final section of this study. What is just as significant in the meantime, though, is the author's deepening fatigue with regard to the direction and nature of modern society. One critic described *More Die of Heartbreak* as indicative of a process by which "Saul Bellow's books

get more and more like seminars in Sodom".[2] Without exactly invoking the hand of divine retribution, the author has undoubtedly laced the novel with an enervating sense of lassitude, a weariness with the contemporary which has reached saturation point, a feeling that things are inevitably destined to fall apart. Most tangible is the feeling the reader receives of the sense of utter powerlessness of the two main characters in an environment which is horribly false, corrupt and spiritually debilitating.

Moreover, we get the distinct impression that, although the two main characters *do* aspire to a higher ideal, their desires do not altogether move in the direction of something higher, something transcendent (as did, for instance, those of Charlie and Corde, to 'higher worlds' and the stars respectively), but rather culminate in a simple search for an opt-out clause from the pressures of modern living - they only want to be left *alone*. Bellow himself, referring to the novel, has described this sense of jaded satiety coupled with crippling fear as "a readily observable condition [...] a lamentation for all parties".[3] *More Die of Heartbreak* is indubitably Bellow's most depressing novel. That it is also his funniest, leavened as it is with the kind of lacerating and chaotic humour which enlivened *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, says much for the novel and for the author's attitude to the phenomena he describes. For, despite all the symptoms of degeneracy he identifies, there is no desire on the author's part to subside beneath the onrush of apocalyptic despair, no disposition to hurl vengeful thunderbolts at the unheeding mob. It may be true, as Blake noted, that "excess of sorrow laughs", but not, I think, in this case. Bellow's eye is too trained, and his touch too gentle for such mania. What emerges is rather the same sort of plaintive comedy evident in the orbits of old Artur Sammler, perhaps with an ounce or two more of regret thrown in. As the mentally hyperactive narrator Kenneth Trachtenberg puts it, not without a fair degree of self-mockery:-

If you venture to think in America, you also feel an obligation to provide a historical sketch to go with it, to authenticate or legitimize your thoughts. So it's one moment of flashing insight and then a quarter of an hour of pedantry and tiresome elaboration - academic gabble. Locke to Freud with stops at local stations like Bentham and Kierkegaard. One has to feel sorry for people in such an explanatory bind. Or else (a better alternative) one can develop an eye for the comical side of this.[4]

That both Trachtenberg's, and Bellow's comedy is defined by the low ebb of sadness should not obscure the characteristically vivacious and ambiguous artistry of the novel. Nor should it lead us to conclude that the author has renounced life, or that "there is nothing that *can* be done except acknowledge the pre-eminence of anti-humanistic forces leading to the 'march of declining humankind'".[5] The pernicious blandishments of "horrible islands of gloom, granite and ice"[129] are irresistible to certain critics. But *More Die of Heartbreak* is not a novel which should be approached for a gleeful certification of one's own bleak forebodings. It should rather be met with a rueful sense of the ridiculous - because it is this sense that ultimately lends a measure of qualified significance to the benighted central characters.

What is immediately apparent about the novel is that its events take place in the most dream-like, fantastic landscape since *Henderson the Rain King*. Although the setting is discernibly that of a Mid-West Rustbelt town, and the narrative is punctuated with factual references, this is not the highly specific realism of, say, *The Dean's December*. Rather, Trachtenberg's environs take on mythic proportions of menace, in the form of nightmarish buildings, as everywhere are seen signs of a voracious and self-serving bureaucratic technology which threatens to crush the feeble individual. Trachtenberg's sensitive uncle, Benn Crader, is particularly vulnerable to the messages of doom these edifices transmit. As he sits down to dinner with his new in-laws, he is oppressed by the predatory presence of the Japanese-owned Ecliptic Circle Electronic Tower (a full view of whose hostility he

is afforded through the luxurious, panoramic windows of his relatives' apartment), part of a 'renewal program' which dominated 'miles of rubble' and whose giant double television masts which "relay programs over the whole region"[126] (Trachtenberg "pictured the moribund as prisoners of the TV"[141]) act as the destructive antennae of an insatiable monster. Then there is the sickly appearance of Benn's supposed abode of wedded bliss, the "bourgeois baroque" Roanoke[148], which stands in grotesquely meretricious relief from the surrounding "caved-in streets and ruined apartment blocks"[146]. Most disturbing of all is the court building where the sexual funfair of the rape hearing takes place, a structure which was designed "in dazzling elliptic curves modeled on the celestial sphere and [which] showed what bold fantasy could realize, relying on the skills of engineers, on miraculous technology"[269]. Trachtenberg superbly characterises it as a building that "didn't threaten Heaven, like the tower of Babel, but subsided from the heights and melted downwards"[269]. The vitality and purity of a natural existence is stifled beneath the dead weight of these representations of an ugly and sinister mechanisation. Benn's memories of his earlier life on the spot where the Electronic Tower now stands, of "mulberry trees" and "grackles"[146], seem hopelessly incongruous. And Trachtenberg, after his cabalistic grandfather, opines that the "Tree of life is buried a thousand feet below the Electronic Tower"[253], the building itself being the rotten fruit of the "Tree of Knowledge". Uncongenial as these surroundings are for Crader and Trachtenberg, though, they provide the *un*natural habitat for the *Sammler*-esque cast of characters whom the two engage, and whose own life-impulses are buried under layers of falseness.

It is the lot of Benn and Kenneth to be enmeshed in the crazy schemes and scams of those whose spiritual deformity and material corruption has reached proportions of epic ludicrousness. Judges, City Hall types and political bigshots fall into one of

two categories: "either they were running for office or were being indicted"[321]. Benn's uncle Harold Vilitzer - sobriquet of "The Big Heat" - is the classic embodiment of a type of brutal politician whose furious energy is expended in shuttling between the aforementioned categories right up to his ninth decade. Benn himself has been fleeced of thousands of dollars by Vilitzer, in the land deal whereby Benn's "garden of love" was supplanted by the appalling Electronic Tower. Vilitzer justifies this act by the view that "where money is concerned, the operational word is *merciless*" and that, moreover, "kinship is bullshit"[282]. Vilitzer's disowned son is Fishl, "an advanced communicator" whose "ideology is technique"[175]. Putting his 'abilities' into a succession of cranky enterpises doomed to failure, Fishl impresses Trachtenberg by his apparent desire to effect a reconciliation with his father, in an attempt to end his own chaos. However, Fishl's filial devotion turns out to be nothing more than a scheme to ensure he is not disinherited - a scheme which uses Benn as a patsy. Not only does the affair end badly, but Trachtenberg's feeling that he received "intimations [...] of a second Fishl"[186], a more genuine Fishl, is made to look foolish.

Most dreadful for Benn is the gradual realisation that he has been sucked into marriage with Matilda by the combined efforts of his bride and her conniving father, Dr.Layamon, in order that they can use him to sue Vilitzer for vast sums as recompense for the crooked land deal. Dr.Layamon, "that medical swell and hotshot" was "a Charlie Mcarthy, a dummy for subconscious forces. Except when he talked about money"[161]. Layamon's lust for money is equalled only by his erotic madness, obscenely evidenced when he drags Benn around his ward to show the latter the sexual organs of decrepit and indifferent old women. And it is with women that Crader and Trachtenberg encounter most distortions and pain. Matilda is beautiful, vain, shallow, nervously distracted and street tough, a social climber

who is the culmination of a type seen earlier in the figures of Madelaine in *Herzog* and Renata in *Humboldt's Gift*. In contrast to Benn's love of the past, Matilda is possessed of what is ominously termed a "progressive orientation"[124]. Crader's 'women trouble' is further glimpsed in the neurotic purveyor of psycho babble, the aptly named Caroline Bunge, whose practice it is to fill herself with tissue paper hours before sexual intercourse. And it reaches a horribly comic nadir in the cries of the spurned Della Bedell, who ends up banging on Benn's door shouting "what am I supposed to do with my sexuality?"[86].

Trachtenberg's problems with the female of the species are no less acute. Deserted by his petite lover, who apparently prefers receiving kicks in the shin from her slobbish new partner than listening to Kenneth's lectures (perhaps no great surprise), Trachtenberg has taken up with Dita Schwartz who, in an effort to get her tutor to notice her more, has a quack operation to alleviate her skin condition, with diabolical consequences. It is ironic that Dita should fall victim to such excesses of the superficial world; she seems possibly the only genuine person among the secondary cast, described as having "ten times more heart in her" than anyone else[208].

But if the craziness of these people is attested to by Kenneth and Benn, it must not be forgotten that they are nearly as mired in madness as any. Referring to Trachtenberg's "maddeningly verbose" and "galumphingly portentous" narrative, Paul Taylor concludes that "the moronic inferno is now, we gather, beginning to swallow up its Dantes".[6] And Michael Glenday complains that Kenneth's idiom is "ponderous, self-involved, and at times insufferably pompous".[7] Well, indeed. But Glenday's central thesis is that the Bellow hero must withdraw in the face of the hostile, anti-humanistic conditions prevailing in modern society. Kenneth, like

every other Bellow hero, shows little sign of being able (or oftentimes even willing) to disengage from this society. And his narrative style is a direct result of his immersion in one of the forms of contemporary insanity - the 'Idea - Madness'. Trachtenberg frequently likes nothing better than to discourse learnedly, incisively, fatuously and irrelevantly all at once, to convert real human experience into the false, jargonised mental world of theory. It is part of the comedy that he can recognise the spuriousness and futility of this - "The tom-toms beating inside our heads, driving us crazy, are the Great Ideas!"[247] - and can classify himself as "a genuinely modern individual (can you say worse of anybody?)"[71], yet is unable to resist the temptation to spout forth, often at the most inopportune moments.

It does not do to claim to recognise the inherent comedy of Trachtenberg's manner, and then attack it as a source of weakness, fouling the integrity of the novel's "serious issues".[8] For to do so is to misrepresent the author's comic purpose. The novel's most "serious issue", that of the search for a pure and uncorrupted love, for some form of spiritual succour in a debased and fallen world, is if anything enhanced by the buffooneries and failures of both Trachtenberg and Crader. Only Trachtenberg, as a 'dangling' man remains imperfect. That the quest for love should be placed in the hands of Kenneth and his uncle may appear to render it farcical and hopeless - but this is not so. "On the trail of his soul", Trachtenberg may well be something of "a creep",[9] but it is the trail itself which lends him dignity. In *More Die of Heartbreak*, Bellow's heroes find that the only thing of *real* value left to them is to pursue the search for love, however frustrating or galling that search might be. As such it is an aim which does not deserve an easy dismissal.

Only Moses Herzog can approximate to Trachtenberg for sheer chaos in the canon of central characters. Kenneth also combines elements of Tamkin, Dahfu and

Spangler into an intellectual *pot-pourri* which makes him the definitive purveyor of what Bellow describes as the "cultural macadam":-

> Things are continually rushing into their head, whether it's from Toynbee or Plato or Immanuel Kant, the Great Books, the news of the day, historic ideas -it's all pounded into a sort of uniform stuff with which the mental roads are paved. And this is what I mean by the cultural macadam.[10]

Trachtenberg gives comic articulation to this phenomenon on several occasions. For example, when Benn casually mentions Dr.Layamon's "connections", directing Kenneth not to sneer at these, the latter opens the flood gates:-

> 'Who me? I'm not a bit skeptical. I read the papers. I'm probably more with it than you are, Uncle. If I didn't follow Wall Street, sports, TV, Washington and the political scene right here, I wouldn't be able to understand my own subject.' By this I meant the St.Petersburg of Blok and Bely in 1913 - and their preoccupations: the satanic darkness, the abyss of the Antichrist, the horrible islands of gloom, granite and ice, the approaching Terrible Judgement, the crimes of Immanuel Kant against human consciousness, and all the rest of that. I have a big stake in keeping up with triumphant America. Doctor's intricate money-and-power didn't surprise me at all.[129]

Or indeed, when Trachtenberg's love for Benn is transformed into a series of theoretical notions:-

> My work was cut out for me: I was to help my dear uncle to defend himself. I didn't suppose that the Layamons meant him any great harm; only they weren't likely to respect his magics or to have the notion of preserving him for the sake of his gifts. There was quite a lot at stake here. I can't continually be spelling it out. As: the curse of human impoverishment as revealed to Admiral Byrd in Antarctica; the sleep of love in human beings as referred to by Larkin; the search for sexual enchantments as the universal nostrum; the making of one's soul as the only project genuinely worth undertaking; and my personal rejection of existentialism, which led me to emigrate and which makes me so severe in my analysis of motives.[155]

Trachtenberg reminds the reader, in style if not in substance, of nothing more than the figure of Proust at dinner, as described to Kenneth by an acquaintance who has made a study of the Frenchman:-

> He told me that Marcel Proust [...] would bend over backwards to answer the question of a lady making small talk at dinner. He would reply at length with such paralysing completeness when no such answer was required or expected. People were flooded with unwanted information by this handsome, wearisome, yogurt-faced table companion. You could die of it.[52-53]

As a boy, Trachtenberg had sat agog at the feet of Alexandre Kojève, as the Russian philosopher issued a health warning regarding his own practices:-

> He warned me in mind-boggling Russian against the glamour of thought, the calculating intellect and its constructions, its fabrications alien to the power of life. There were two varieties of truth, one symbolised by the Tree of Knowledge, the other by the Tree of Life, one the truth of striving, the other the truth of receptivity. Knowledge divorced from life equals sickness.[57]

Trachtenberg suffers from this sickness not so much in that he *divorces* knowledge from life, but in that he *converts* actual experience in a sloppy, indiscriminate and ultimately damaging way into the realm of the general and theoretical, a realm where pure life itself finally loses much of its value. This tendency is never better, or more obscenely illustrated than when Trachtenberg, visiting his mother who works as an aid agent in a famine-ravaged Somalian refugee camp, gorges himself on Fauchon charcuterie complemented by a first rate calvados, and then begins to prate on about the East having the "ordeal of privation" while the West has the "ordeal of desire", about how the sufferings of the soul in super-abundant America have every right to be compared to the more 'traditional' forms of suffering in the East, namely "war, plague, famine and slavery"[100]. It may be a valid and challenging point in its own right, but in the context of the refugees' agony

it simply seems grotesque. Kenneth notes, with a tinge of hurt incomprehension, that "Mother was scandalized by my theorizing"[101].

In fairness to Kenneth, he realises to a certain extent how stupidly inconsequential his theorizing can be: he refers variously to "my great weakness"[52]; to "useful elucidation" being "another weakness of mine"[92]; and as he sits in at the Cusper rape hearing he concludes that "this was no time for theory - discussion: one of my deepest weknesses, more harrowing to me than you might think (a haunting, perhaps destructive habit)"[278]. Yet, astonishingly, he can accuse Benn of being a propagator of "thought-bosh"[13], and an "excitable bore" given to delivering interminable lectures[53]. Moreover, Trachtenberg's arrogation of the spiritual high ground which he takes upon himself at the inception of the novel seems distinctly silly:-

> And please don't get me wrong. I take very little pleasure in theories and I'm not going to dump ideas on you. I used to be sold on them, but I discovered that they were nothing but trouble if you entertained them indiscriminately. We are looking at matters for which theorizing brings no remedy.[19]

In the context of events, the last sentence could act as a maxim for the novel, but this does not prevent Kenneth from attempting to apply his own brand of "thought-bosh" as a curative to Benn's woes. For despite his claim that "I trust psychology less and less. I see it as one of the lower by-products of the restlessness or oscillation of modern consciousness, a terrible agitation which we prize as 'insight'"[51], Trachtenberg adds to the agitation with his own psychological and philosophical babble on teeth-grindingly inappropriate occasions, such as when Benn tells him with some anxiety how sharp Matilda's teeth are:-

> But you can't fault people for their teeth. If the opening of a beautiful woman's mouth is a noteworthy occurrence, that in itself may testify against the observer

rather than the woman [...] And his first wife proved to have influenced him (Benn) with Swedenborgian notions, after all. The correspondence theory, for instance: A tree is not merely a natural object, it is a Sign. There are correspondences. Objects, beautiful or ugly, are communications. A human face gives information, as do colors, shapes, fragrances. So Matilda is opening her mouth, right? And uncle Benn notices that a woman of great beauty may have four bulges in the gums, at the base of her canine teeth. This defect, if it was a defect and not an indication of perversity in the perceiver, an impulse to quarrel with perfection or a quirkiness that indicates resistance to the potency of beauty, may be a sign of weakness. High beauty may be a torment. It tears at our hearts (some of us), and then we frantically fight it. We superimpose a Medusa on the innocent face of a girl.
What's the use of talking! [143-144]

Or when Benn is agonising about having to put some Layamon-instigated pressure on 'The Big Heat' Kenneth berates him:-

'Harold showed me disrespect in the Electronic Tower deal.'
'That doesn't mean you have to give him a coronary. In one of our talks, Uncle, one of us said that this big money gives you the maximum opportunity to abuse yourself. Yet somehow I feel that you want the money. *You*, for some reason, would like to have it!'
He cried, 'That's just not true.'
'Maybe not for the money's sake alone. I don't know. Schopenhauer said that money was abstract happiness. Maybe it was Hegel.'
'For the love of God, Kenneth. Not *now* ...'[259]

The reader *does* get the impression, however, that for all his dreary rationality and 'head-culture' gobbledegook (which reaches absurd lengths when Benn is seen eagerly transcribing Trachtenberg's latest prescriptions for the former's tangled emotional life, the usual mixture of perceptivity and bunk, over the telephone in the pitch-dark of the Layamon's laundry room[266]), Trachtenberg is aware that it is the emotional and spiritual aspects of the human being which are in dire need of resuscitation.

To this end, Trachtenberg boldly announces his "Project Turning Point", an enterprise which demonstrates that "in this day and age you have no reason to exist

unless you believe that you can make your life a turning point. A turning point for everybody - for humankind"[68]; which shows the futility of "joining the general march of declining humankind"[98]; and which proclaims that "conscious existence might be justified only if it was devoted to the quest for a revelation, a massive reversal, an inspired universal change, a new direction, a desperately needed human turning point"[315]. Here, it seems, is *the* great 'humanistic' endeavour to be undertaken by the Bellow hero - were it not for the fact that this project seeks its answers anywhere *but* the rational. For the responsibility for initiating this magical process, for transforming humankind, is deemed by Trachtenberg to lie on the stooped shoulders of none other than Benn Crader.

For Kenneth, Benn represents his "expectations, [his] hopes for significant closure"[32]. And since he believes that they were "doubly, multiply, interlinked"[15], Trachtenberg hopes to bathe in the reflected qualities of his uncle. Though Crader is by profession a scientist, it is clear that for Trachtenberg his uncle's significance lies beyond science, beyond rationality, beyond technology, in an area where communion with the deepest, longest-buried human feelings is possible. Crader is saddled by his nephew with the burden of taking Man back to essentials, of leading the return to innocence.

It is in botanist Benn's relationship to plants that Trachtenberg sees signs of what he terms the "magics"[23]. To Kenneth, Benn seems to be a sort of "plant mystic"[52], a man whose sensitivity and receptivity make him "a plant clairvoyant"[305]. "What you have to consider," notes Trachtenberg, "is a Jew who moves into the vegetable kingdom, studying leaves, bark, roots, heartwood, sapwood, flowers, for their own sake. There was something Druidical about this"[27]. Deciding that Crader is "a communicant in a green universal church"[305]

(a judgement which is endorsed by the old Japanese professor who sees "something *visionary* about the distinctness with which 'plants came before him"(Crader)[105]), Kenneth founds the aim of 'Project Turning Point' on Benn's ability to transfer these properties from the plant world into the realm of human affairs, specifically in the domain of love. As Kenneth describes his uncle: "He was born with that increasingly rare capacity, he could actually fall in love, I thought"[23]. Crader is "a man of feeling"[18], "a true person" who "never deviates from his original, given nature"[254]. Indeed, Trachtenberg is given to picturing his uncle as a substitute for Henri Rousseau's recumbent nude woman in the forest clearing, attracting the lascivious looks of half-hidden tigers. There any connection with the *name* of Rousseau ends, however, as Benn, it seems, has retained his purity (and naivety) in spite of the hostilities of society. Such a paragon of virtue has Crader become that Trachtenberg is moved to characterise him as a "Citizen of Eternity":-

> To name at random a number of such Citizens will reveal what the word 'Eternity' signifies: Moses, Achilles, Odysseus, the Prophets, Socrates, Edgar in *King Lear*, Prospero, Pascal, Mozart, Pushkin, William Blake. These we think about and, if possible, make our souls by [...] If Benn was not yet a Citizen, if Eternity was not ready to give him his second papers, he was as close to it as I had ever been able to come.[69]

Trachtenberg's hunch is that Benn will make the grade, a person "not cut off from his inner sources"[141]. But if Crader still has access to the most fundamental needs of his soul, then his ability to chart their path out into the world must be called into question.

It is not just a case of the *suitability* of Crader's advocacy of, as Trachtenberg puts it, "Love, the very essence of the Divine Spirit and the source for humankind of the warmth of heaven"[277] in an unaccommodating reality. It is also a case of how far Benn's needs are distorted by his involvement in the contemporary sexual lunacies.

Trachtenberg acknowledges with regret that "Uncle was profoundly upset by a succession of sexual miseries"[111], and that Benn, in his fifties, was "still tormented, a full-scale example of the ordeal by desire"[110]. Kenneth mitigates the harshness of his judgement with his view that Benn kept "as an inner shrine, a vision of an abiding intimacy. Those promises of love and kindness. Only he looked for them in the oddest places"[83]. These "odd places" invariably take the form of the most physical sensuality. The suspicion, as Kenneth articulates it, is that Benn has been "acquiescing in the preeminence of sex, putting it at the heart of existence, bowing to the consensus"[308]. Trachtenberg feels that Benn "was, or once had been, a sensualist. Foolish to say 'once had been'. If you were that, you continued for life to be it in some degree ..."[95]. Benn's track record, involving two wives and goodness knows how many mistresses, amply demonstrates his propensities. And when the eminent botanist complains about "things private citizens can't do much about - the bomb, for instance. After the atomic one, the orgiastic one was dropped on us", Dr.Layamon upbraids him with the highly believable claim that "*You* didn't dive into a shelter"[159].

But it is in his marriage with Matilda where things appear most unusual. No doubt Matilda is not the most propitious of choices for Benn. Yet when Benn talks about his deepest feelings for Matilda he seems either to be fighting to convince himself of the veracity of his emotions - "I *love* her"[157] - or dealing in empty textbook platitudes: "Through love you penetrate to the essence of a being" - Trachtenberg thinks that Benn is here "talking through his hat"[225]. Moreover, Benn's means for penetrating through to the essence of a being seem to involve Matilda dressing up in frilly blouses and being dragged to a particular corner of the bed[292]. What seems most bizarre, though, is the way in which Crader's unease about the marriage manifests itself. As comprehension of the Layamons' plot dawns

on him, it takes its toll. But more significant for Benn are the portents he receives from absurd and incongruous sources. As he watches Hitchcock's 'Psycho', the image of Tony Perkins in drag (and particularly his broad shoulders) is instantaneously fused with the body of Matilda. As Trachtenberg gravely observes, "this vision in the movie house told him not to marry her"[233]. Crader is not oblivious to the depressing message being transmitted here, namely that his heart is "activated by trash" and "Hollywood ptomaine"[234]. But his irrationality continues when he bursts forth in anguish the secret which has been troubling him - Matilda's breasts are too far apart. Irrationality in the context of the novel is undoubtedly a valuable commodity, and indeed Benn's instincts ultimately triumph over his judgement, extricating him from the potentially soulless married life which awaited him. But there is an irrationality of the heart and an irrationality of madness and mania - Crader seems to teeter between the two.

Moreover, why, in this supposedly 'spiritual' man, does his disquiet become actuated by the deeply physical and tangible? (remember also Crader's concern over Matilda's teeth). It could be argued that Crader is so concerned with matters of the spirit that he is in headlong retreat from physical reality, to the extent that he finds the latter a horror. But with a past like his, intensely grounded in the senses, this is doubtful. And in any case, Crader's spiritual instincts are badly, perhaps irreparably damaged by the shattering revelation ( unpredictable to him if not to the reader) that the azalea in the Layamons' apartment with which he has been practising botanical clairvoyancy for several weeks, is artificial: "After all these years of unbroken rapport, to be taken in," he wails, "The one thing I could always count on. My occupation, my instinct, my connection... broken off"[300]. Small wonder, then, that Crader fails to live up to the grossly exaggerated status awarded him by Kenneth.

Benn's view is that he has "assist[ed] at the degradation of love"[277] (doubly ironic in that to escape the Layamons' world of false love, he has to act deceitfully himself). But then Benn had never been quite as pure and innocent as Trachtenberg's ideal. Trachtenberg himself had owned up to this: Benn "preferred to come on innocent - innocent and perplexed, and even dumb-looking. That was better for all concerned. This business of deliberate of elected 'innocence' is damn curious..."[15]. Moreover, Crader "represented (*seemed* to represent) the *old* innocence"[16]. Which begs the question why Kenneth had assigned such glorious credentials to Benn in the first place. Ultimately, it is not so much Crader's fitness for the role of culture-transformer which should be called into question but rather Trachtenberg's delusions over his uncle's status. Such false impressions lead Kenneth to characterize Benn, after the latter's failures in love and relationships (specifically with Matilda) as "a man who had lost the privilege of vision, [and] fallen into the opposite and brutal prevailing outlook"[328]. Such a judgement is skewed because Benn is no fallen angel. He has always, to a certain extent, partaken of this outlook. More accurate, and more charitable to Benn, would be the reader's acceptance of Crader's sad philosophy on his inability to find something meaningful and lasting amidst the chaos of his existence:-

> A newspaperman had me on the phone a few days ago [...] he wanted a statement about plant life and the radiation level increasing. Also dioxin and other harmful wastes. He was challenging about it. Well - I agreed it was bad. But in the end I said, 'It's terribly serious, of course, but I think more people die of heartbreak than of radiation.' [87]

As was mentioned earlier, Bellow's animadversions on the deleterious effects of contemporary existence reach levels of ubiquitous and close-to-intolerable intensity in *More Die of Heartbreak.* Were it not for the melancholic risibility of the situations such effects produce, their intensity *would* be unbearable. And yet, for all that, Trachtenberg finds himself in the classic Bellovian position of the dangling

man. For he can find neither satisfaction nor sanctuary *whichever* direction he travels in.

At the heart of Kenneth's (and indeed Benn's) problem is the opposition between public, politicized consciousness and the personal, feeling self. Somewhere in the middle both men must try to locate their souls. "The main enterprise," notes Trachtenberg," was America itself, and the increase of its powers. Submission to those powers made something of you"[194]. Kenneth had earlier outlined just what it took to become a constituted, and importantly, *recognised* 'self':-

> A full-blooded man would be engaged with government, with markets, with computers, with law, with war, with virile action - above all with public life and politics: the armed might of the superpowers, the ambitions of Stalin's heirs, the Middle East, the CIA, the Supreme Court. Or money equivalents of the same. Or sexual ones, an eroticism matching superpower politics.[28]

It might be wondered in the light of the foregoing whether Kenneth and Benn are indeed "full-blooded" men, bearing in mind the torrents of information (as many from the contemporary public sphere as from literature and philosophy) which flow in Trachtenberg's mind, and Crader's own disordered version of superpower eroticism. But it should be emphasised that the reason why Kenneth's diagnoses of the debased modern consciousness are often so acute is that he is so enmeshed in its nets. That he can nevertheless see the corruptive effects of the mental vortex demonstrates that he is not entirely sunk. And it has already been seen just how 'contemporary' Benn can be. In the encouraging idiom of counsellors to addicts, both men at least realise that they need help. In any case, the two, by their predilections of Russian Literature and botany respectively, have effectively debarred themselves from 'serious' consideration:-

...in general, this was a century of hybrids, and [that] if you weren't one, if you asserted that you lived by a classical, traditional standard, as some people took credit for doing, you were out of it [...] You might be an estimable person, but you were living 'elsewhere' - pre-1914, even pre-eighteenth century. That might feel nice, certainly, but it meant that you had excused yourself from the present age, you had opted out. [190]

Even with Trachtenberg's self-serving pomposity taken into account, it is quite true to suggest that neither he nor Benn are as submerged in the present age as the likes of Harold, Matilda and Dr.Layamon. Trachtenberg and Crader are men both in and out of time. As Kenneth recalls the "high-serious stuff" of Kojève's historical sketches - "no porno, sadomasochistic or pederastic lewdness for table talk" - he formulates the reason for modern decay thus:-

Unless your thinking is deduced from a correct conception of history, unless you live in your time, thinking will only confuse you - it will drive you nuts. The terrible result of hyperactive but unfocused consciousness is a cause of our decline. [36]

This may seem a bit rich coming from Trachtenberg, but at least his focus (such as it is) is on something ennobling and timeless, and not on the mad, nihilistic whirlpools of sex, money and death. Kenneth is horrified by the constant bombardment on the individual by the detritus of public 'experience', insanely desultory and stupefying. He talks of "the proliferation of a multitude of false worlds to whose rules people were earnestly committed. They could draw you along because they seemed to know what they were doing. All the while they were in a deep trance but still spoke authoritatively for the 'real'"[187]. And he gives an analysis of this phenomenon, as purveyed by the likes of Spangler in *The Dean's December*:-

All of this, not to beat around the bush, refers to the fallen state in which our species finds itself. A profusion of made-up events is supposed to divert us from it in order to compensate us. The profusion, often passing for 'information', is really a disguise for kitsch entertainment. Death also, while you enjoy a viewer's immunity from it, is entertaining, as it was in imperial Rome, or in 1793. As, today, Sadat is murdered, Indira Gandhi is assassinated, the Pope himself is gunned down in

St.Peter's Square, while personally unharmed, *you* live to see more and more and more, until after many deferrals death gets personal even with you. The jumpmaster says, 'You bail out next.' [...] Events are profuse, but (and this is what 'a fallen state' signifies) the personal space for their accommodation is very limited. [19]

The pressure on the self from the incessant flurry of external events entails a glum corollary for those things which necessarily belong in the domain of the personal:-

Your soul had its work cut out for it in this extraordinary country [...] There seems to be a huge force that advances, propels and this propellant increases its power by drawing value away from personal life and fitting us for its colossal purpose. It demands the abolition of such things as love and art ... of gifts like uncle's, which it can tolerate intermittently if they don't get in the way. [301]

Ultimately, the value of the self and its familiars withers away, the private sphere becomes odious in the face of omnipresent 'actuality'. For Benn, the self of love decays, for Kenneth, the self of art:-

As for types like my own, obscurely motivated by the conviction that our existence was worthless if we didn't make a turning point of it, we were assigned to the humanities, to poetry, philosophy, painting - the nursery games of humankind, which had to be left behind when the age of science began. The humanities would be called upon to choose a wallpaper for the crypt, as the end drew near. And if there is no turning point, it will soon be time for the 'esthetic' call. [246-247]

But, as ever for the Bellow hero, "personal freedom is beset by choice-torments"[61]. For if the turmoil of gargantuan public reality limits the development and significance of qualities dependent on the definition of the self, then doubts, as they have done throughout Bellow's novelistic canon, persist over the viability and genuineness of individual constructs. Kenneth's caution can be traced to his reading of Admiral Richard Byrd's book, *Alone* ( significantly recommended to him by Benn). Byrd describes the "claustrophobia of consciousness"[33] resultant from small groups being bound together during the long Antarctic night. What is revealed to Kenneth is the bleakness and fragility of the self:-

Byrd says that under such conditions it didn't take them long to find each other out. And what was it that they so quickly found out? 'The time comes when one has nothing to reveal to the other, when even his unformed thoughts can be anticipated, his pet ideas become a meaningless drool.' [...] 'There is no escape anywhere. You are hemmed in on every side by your inadequacies and the crowding pressures of your associates.' So in the coldest cold on the face of the earth, X-rays are struck off, showing in gray and white the deformities and diseases of civilised personalities, and your own are at the center. If you had to spend six months in solitude on the dark side of the moon rummaging your bosom, what rich materials do you suppose you would turn up? [20]

This horror both of one's own emptiness and that of others extends into Trachtenberg's own private circumstances, which he describes as "almost always a bouquet of sores with a garnish of trivialities or downright trash"[39]. Finding himself to be "knee-deep in the garbage of a pesonal life, the ordeal of the West!"[312], Kenneth ends, not so much with the revelation, as with the acceptance that his ex-wife Treckie "didn't really care a damn about me. For her, I didn't even exist":-

That was nothing to get excited about, as it was one of the commoner human experiences - neither to give a damn nor be given a damn about. In practice it was accepted as a matter of course, though at heart nobody quite came to terms with it.[319]

What has supplanted authentic feeling in the self in the contemporary world is a powerful force which seems to carry meaning and significance solely in terms of an erotic and manipulatory vanity:-

Blood is charged with longing. The red blood is egotistical, with terrible powers, with desire and perverse impulses, and carrying strange wastes that demand purgation. Blood is that in which the Self lives.[128]

Trachtenberg himself is not immune to the persuasive wiles of the fallen self, noting that, "for the sake of self-esteem"[174], he welcomes the muddled erotic supplications of Dita, although he concludes, not totally convincingly, that:-

...it's a tiresome preoccupation, self-esteem. Something has to be done to limit the number of people whose opinions can affect us. Unless they care for us, or have done us some good, or hold out some promise, why should their views matter?[174]

On top of the fact that Trachtenberg's question seems to *court* flattery and self-esteem, self-effacement does not appear to be high on the list of priorities of a man who traffics in pompous theorizing and views his own existence as a potential 'turning point' (as the interpreter of Crader's 'magics'). Nevertheless, Kenneth avers that he intends to recover the true self, something like the 'decent self' of Kipling as outlined in the earlier chapter on *The Victim*:-

I have a weakness for the big issues. The meaning of human love. The sacrifice of egoism for the salvation of individuality [...] The egoist valuing himself so highly and crediting himself with absolute significance is in a sense correct because every human being as a center of living powers and as a possibility of infinite perfection is *capable* of possessing absolute significance and worth and one can't value oneself too highly. *But* it is unjust and evil to refuse significance to others. [292]

The problem is that Kenneth, although by no means as destructively egocentric as such as Harold or Dr.Layamon, is still reluctant to concede a significance on anything like the grand scale outlined above to those whom he perceives to be agents of the fallen world - in short, to those whom he feels are not like *him*. And one easily understands how much self-esteem is involved in this! Kenneth, though, is most honest when he comes to identify the reason for the void in the personal space:-

There are people who advise you to leave the heart out of it altogether. It shouldn't figure, it's untrustworthy. In some cases the heart takes early retirement [...] Everybody pays the heart lip service of course, but everybody is more familiar with the absence of love than with its presence and gets so used to the feeling of emptiness that it becomes 'normal'. You don't miss the foundation of feeling until you begin to look for your self and can't find a support in the affects for a self. [241]

Trachtenberg has identified what is most horrible of all, particularly to his beleaguered uncle. The corruption of consciousness, the corruption of the self - both entail the corruption of love.

Despite Benn's being embedded in the world of sensuality, there is no reason to doubt that his despair is rooted in the absence of an underlying and cementing love. He talks sadly of what he terms his "pain schedule":-

> Towards the end of your life you have something like a pain schedule to fill out - a long schedule like a federal document, only it's your pain schedule. Endless categories. First, physical causes - like arthritis, gallstones, menstrual cramps. Next category, injured vanity, betrayal, swindle, injustice. But the hardest items of all have to do with love. [11]

Benn's pain in this last category is acutely felt, for if love is not being degraded for financial and social gain (as it is in his marriage to Matilda), it is being substituted by a frantic, self-justifying and profoundly nihilistic carnality. This earth, "the mundane egg where all creatures, all beings, lived on death, infected by death in the very desire for love, the only force that held out a hope against being devoured altogether"[89], holds no place where escape from the prevailing sexual totemism can be effected. In a memorable scene, Benn and Kenneth's vacation in Kyoto is interrupted by a trip to a strip club. There, the fetish worlds of business, scientific technology, money and power converge in a grotesque nexus, unified by dominant sexuality:-

> Then each of the girls in turn stooped, opened her knees, and dilated herself with her fingers. Dead silence. A kind of static insanity descended on the house [...] Everybody had to see, to see, to see the thing of things, the small organ red as a satin pincushion [...] All these business and laboratory wizards rivaling the Germans, the British, and the Americans, these high-tech and management types, not one of them drunk, not one opening his mouth, had come to see what these girls were displaying [...] All these botanists, engineers, inventors of miraculous visual instruments from

electron microscopes to equipment that sent back pictures of the moons of Saturn, cared for nothing but these slow openings. They couldn't look enough. [107-108]

As Trachtenberg had earlier opined, "this literalness, from a sexual standpoint, is lethal. When it comes to a matter of limbs, members and organs, Eros faces annihilation"[90].

Kenneth is familiar with the emptiness behind the mad sensuality from the figure of his father, "the premise of [whose] eroticism was mortality"[69], and both he and Benn encounter it in the shapes of Treckie's mother (whose "sexual craziness" is entirely due to her advancing years, to her refusal "to join the census of the dead"[211]), and the forlorn appeals of Della Bedell. Small wonder that "once you get into the erotic life modern style, you are accelerated until your minutest particles fly apart"[240]. Significantly, in the light of the delusive nature of public consciousness, it is the creation of crisis mentalities which acts as a cover for "lasciviousness and libertinage"[41]. And there is no more twisted an example of the hallucinatory nature of public experience than the Cusper rape case. Described by Trachtenberg as a "sex show"[252] and as "lewd communications with the public"[275], the hearing is "a big hit on TV"[252]. Truth is obscured in an obscene farrago of show business rot, as born-again victim makes lachrymose public atonement for her (perhaps) sending the wrong man to jail at the original case three years previously. Batteries of lawyers and movie agents move in for their piece of the action. And in front of the ubiquitous camera, the corrupt State Governor wallows in titillation as he dredges up the sexually explicit details and evidence pertaining (and not pertaining) to the case. Most appalling to Benn in this sexual maelstrom is the appearance of the word 'LOV' carved into the victim's belly with a broken bottle, an illiterate testament to where Crader's most cherished concern now finds itself. This type of public nadir would be absurd if it were not already an

entirely familiar sight on American television. But it is from this kind of example of stupefied de-consciousness that Trachtenberg is led to greater and greater appreciation of the mystical and metaphysical, evidenced in his theory (again!) about what happens to love in the modern world, a theory first enunciated by Kenneth's old Russian teacher, M.Yermelov:-

He told me that each of us had his angel, a being charged with preparing us for a higher evolution of the spirit [...] we were aware, each of us, of a small glacier in the breast [...] This glacier must be thawed and the necessary warmth for that must, to begin with, be willed. Thinking begins with willing, and thinking must be warmed and colored with feeling. The task of angels is to instil warmth into our souls [...] Here the difficulty is that waking consciousness is so very meager. The noise of the world is so terrible that we can endure it only by being coated with sleep. We can give the angels little help from within when they try to instill warmth into us - the warmth of love. And the angels are also fallible [...] And, said Yermelov, they goof. Our waking consciousness louses up their efforts, and since they have orders to transmit their impulse at all costs, they send it when we're sleeping. What happens then is terrible [...] Denied access to the soul, the angels work directly on the sleeping body. In the physical body this angelic love is corrupted into human carnality. Such is the source of all the disturbed sexuality of the present age.

Trachtenberg continues:-

The *prise de courant* led directly into the flesh and the instincts, whereas the current should have gone into the sentient soul. Instead, planetary demons of electricity were entering us from beneath, coming from the interior of the earth [...] As the millenium approached its end, this was the true picture of human sexuality. Eros himself was assailed by electricity and at the same time by sclerosis. Pure love is overcome by perversity. We become fixated on the sexual members [...] Erotic obsessions, concupiscence, lewdness - the sexual furies - are streaming after us. You have to pity the angels too. By their failure to penetrate our sodden sleep they also degenerate. M.Yermelov would insist on this. [72-73]

According to Kenneth, your only ground for refusing to consider the corruption of love into carnality an ordeal (the ordeal of the West, as so incongruously elaborated earlier) is that "you aren't *conscious* of it"[111]. But what this essentially means is that Trachtenberg is unable to resolve the problem of love. Cast as he is as one of

the unhappy few who *are* conscious of love's debasement, albeit in a typically vitiated way, such knowledge does not avail him much when dealing with those who are quite content to stew in a "sodden sleep". And it is the buzz of modern consciousness, amply demonstrated by Kenneth, which is the enemy of the angelic forces of warmth and love. Trachtenberg realises as much:-

> The secret of our being still asks to be unfolded. Only now we understand that worrying at it and ragging it is no use. The first step is to stop these oscillations of consciousness that are keeping me awake. Only, before you command the oscillations to stop, before you check out, you must maneuver yourself into a position in which metaphysical aid can approach. [331]

Trachtenberg can no more stop these mental tremors than he can form satisfactory relationships. And if he were to "check out", and invite the attention of his angelic abstractions, then he would surely end up passive, isolated, and deprived of that very love he seeks to revive. Consequently, he finds himself in the position of a man who must continue to seek love in a fallen and graceless world. Though he sees sex as *the* analgesic to every conceivable trouble - "the act by which love would be transmitted if there *were* any"[86] - Trachtenberg's faith in love ultimately remains unimpaired:-

> It's love that makes the difference, Uncle. These defects jump out at you because love punishes you for drafting it against its will; it's one of those powers of the soul that won't be conscripted. It makes beauty, it makes strength; sometimes for special purposes, when really inspired, it even produces new organs. Without it, critical consciousness simply reduces all comers to their separate parts, it disintegrates them. [265]

The parallel condition to that of love is found in the form of Benn's research into Arctic lichens:-

Those Arctic lichens are frozen through and through. Ninety-five percent of their existence is solid ice. But at the slightest warming they revive and even grow a bit. This can go on for thousands of years. [315]

Like the plants, love in the contemporary world exists, but exists in a state of suspended animation, buried under layers of ice. That neither Trachtenberg nor Crader finally succeed in thawing it out does not negate the fact of its continuation. It merely emphasise how arduous and troublesome is the quest for love in modern circumstances - but then that has ever been the case with any precious commodity.

Crader's "survival measure" is to place *himself* in suspended animation, by fleeing from the Layamons into the frozen wastes of the Arctic. There he can apply "global masses of ice and hyperborean darkness" to himself - "Night so that I can't see myself. Ice as a corrective. Ice for the rigor"[334]. As Kenneth locates the envelope containing Benn's forwarding address (which the former is instructed not to give to Matilda), the chill of the conclusion becomes apparent:-

The envelope contained, neatly printed in his own scientific hand, the unfamiliar name of the research group and the address of a Finnish prof in Helsinki (home and office), plus the box number of an incomprehensible location in reindeer country, far out on the tundra. Probably near Novaya Zemlya. Even that was not remote enough. [335]

Crader, a victim of the conundrum that says "when you come down into contemporary life you can really get it in the neck. If on the other hand you decline to come down into it, you'll never understand a *thing*"[277], seems to have opted for the latter choice as a palliative to his woes. In doing so, he appears to embody the most bitter and defeatist settlement of a Bellow novel, the man of love withdrawing into gloom, granite and ice. Perhaps this *is* the bleakest picture with which Bellow has presented us. But it is still not so clear-cut. True, one recalls Dr.Layamon's judgement that "a man who likes people doesn't wind up in the Antarctic"[163], a

judgement which could have equal validity at the other pole. But since Crader owned that the alternative to his Arctic expedition was to "go and drown myself right here, off Miami Beach"[334], his self-refrigeration might seem less grim. And past history suggests that Crader is not completely done for, in that Kenneth's characterisation of Benn as "a phoenix who runs after arsonists [...] Burnt to the ground, reincarnated from the ashes"[198-99] rings true. Crader's life has been defined by the succession of encounters and entanglements with women, inevitably ending in failure, or in bereavement (his first wife). Benn's deepest instinct is to continue the crazy search for love, to return to the fray, and there is a hint that he will do just this in his acknowledgement of his phoenix-like status in his closing words to Kenneth. Whether he has been so demoralised by his involvement with the Layamons that he can never return is a moot point. Perhaps Crader has mitigated some of his 'dangling' by his withershins course, but he still seems to be a man spinning between a vain (in the current climate) longing for a pure, spiritual love, and a simultaneous attraction to and repulsion from the fallen world of sensuality. Until the moment (if it should ever come) when Crader's potential for true love can again be activated (and bearing in mind the possible consequences for him in view of his knowledge of Admiral Byrd's book), he must lie dormant in his ice lair, a confused and compromised sleeping beauty.

As for Trachtenberg, he is if anything even *more* confused than Benn, dangling as he still is between the attractive-destructive Idea-madness and the wreckage of his private life, between the politicised and the personal, between governance by the mental and submersion in the emotional. Seeing his grandiose 'Project Turning Point' put, at the very least, on hold by the flight of Benn, Kenneth will continue to seek spiritual balm in the writings of his Russian masters, whilst at the same time being unable to break with the frenzied pursuits of modern society. As a man with a

heart in the past and a consciousness in the present, Kenneth would make a fitting novelistic end-product to Saul Bellow's narrative imagination.

"We leave Bellow's novel," says Michael Glenday, "with the clear sense that there is no cure for the spiritual and emotional haemorrhage of our time, and that deaths from heartbreak will go on increasing."[11] Moreover, he further opines that if Kenneth "in all his feeble personality and tedious speechifying is humanism's defendant, then that hope will remain unregenerate",[12] before concluding that "in *More Die of Heartbreak* Bellow reveals the futility of trying to hold to a humanist ideology in contemporary times."[13] I do not agree with these statements. For neither Trachtenberg nor Crader are suited , either by temperament or by character, to carry the burden of 'humanist ideology'. It would be possible to view 'Project Turning Point' as some sort of humanistic endeavour, but in the hands of a man like Trachtenberg, a purveyor of rationality gone mad - and which, importantly, often leads to his *isolation* - such a scheme was bound to flounder. And Crader's simple goal of having two people joined together in love by no means equips him for any vast design encompassing mankind. Indeed, both men, as has been shown, continually move in the direction of the emotional, sometimes towards the mystical. The fact is that the novel does not relate the defeat of humanism, as it was never intended to be constructed on this premise. What we see is two men who are involved in what is ultimately a deep personal search for what every Bellow hero has sought to some extent or another. It is a search which involves no ideology, no prescriptions, no spurious edicts or requisitions, and which charts its path along a primary, pure and essential route. What Bellow had written thirty years before *More Die of Heartbreak* still holds true, for it is here that the remedy to the "spiritual and emotional haemorrhage" of our, or of any time, can be found:-

A book, any book, may easily be superfluous. But to manifest love - can that be superfluous? Is there so much of it about us? Not so much. It is still rare, still wonderful. It is still effective against distraction.[14]

References.

The epigraphs are, respectively:-

Hawthorne, Nathaniel: 'Ethan Brand' from *Nathaniel Hawthorne's Tales*, ed., James McIntosh, W.W.Norton & Co., Ontario, 1987, p223.

Bellow, Saul: Roudané Interview, *Contemporary Literature*, 25.3, 1984, pp265-280, (p270).

[1] Bellow, Saul: 'Foreword' to *Something to Remember Me By*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, 1993, ppvi,x.

[2] Kemp, Peter: 'America's Carnival of excess', *Sunday Times*, 25 October, 1987, p66.

[3] Crosland, Susan: 'Bellow's Real Gift', *Sunday Times*, 18 October, 1987, p57.

[4] Bellow, Saul: *More Die of Heartbreak*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, 1987, pp190-191. All subsequent references cited in text.

[5] Glenday: *S.B.D.H.*, p169.

[6] Taylor, Paul: 'Pontificating away in the Spiritual Ice-Age', *Literary Review*, October 1987, pp21-22, (p22).

[7] Glenday: *S.B.D.H.*, p171.

[8] ibid, p172.

[9] Strawson, Galen: 'Professor Crader's Satellite', *Times Literary Supplement*, 23-29, October 1987, pp1157-1158, (p1158).

[10] Douglas Henry interview, pp705-707, (p707).

[11] Glenday: *S.B.D.H.*, p177.

[12] ibid, p177.

[13] ibid, p177.

[14] Bellow, Saul: 'Distractions of a Fiction Writer', in Hicks ed., *The Living Novel: A Symposium*, MacMillan, New York, 1957, p20.

## Conclusion - A journey inwards - and Inwards.

"Between extremities
Man runs his course ..."
Yeats, 'Vacillation'.

"I might have said, if I hadn't been excited to the point of sickness, that I didn't ride around the city on the cars to make a buck or be useful to the family but to take a reading of this boring, depressed, ugly, endless, rotting city. I couldn't have thought it then, but my purpose was to interpret this place. Its power was tremendous. But so was mine, potentially. I refused absolutely to believe that people here were doing what they thought they were doing. Beneath the apparent life of these streets was their real life, beneath each face the real face, beneath each voice and its words the true tone and the real message."
Saul Bellow, 'Something to remember me by'.

In the years following the appearance of *More Die of Heartbreak*, Saul Bellow, if not exactly fleeing Crader-like into his own personal Novaya Zemlya, has certainly backtracked from the relentless gaze of both critic and public alike - or perhaps it might be more accurate to say that the author *would desire* to do so if such a thing were still possible. His works, for better or worse, are now irretrievably 'public' property - and so is the author himself. It is surely the supreme irony that that consciousness which Bellow has so strikingly represented in his works - that of the overfull, hideously public and profoundly flimsy mind - threatens to be the force which ultimately impoverishes not only his art, but all art. In Bellow's particular case, his trademark usages of ambiguity and character complexity in his novels are anathema to the vast whirlpools of false public experience. Amidst images that alternately thrill and bore us, stupefying us into surrender, amidst mental pollution which masquerades as 'information' or 'education', in all the gigantic turbulence of the omnipresent external, we have no room left for deep consideration of the artist and his art. We have *too much* on our minds. When we pick up a novel like *The Dean's December*, we say, 'Here is a book which warns us of the enervating effects of a ravenous, outwardly-directed intelligence' - perhaps we say this - before moving

quickly on to the next necessary, unnecessary thought (not so much 'thought' as *stimulation*). Our appreciation of the novel flies off into the ether. For ease of storage in our saturated consciousness, for the purposes of a dreadful utility, the words 'Saul Bellow' themselves become transmuted into the nothingness lexicon of buzzwords which lack any real depth or significance with regard to the complexity of art - 'humanism', 'pessimism', 'conservative', 'liberal'. By means of associating the author -any author - with certain key words in our limited public vocabulary of platitudes and debased terms, we can feel satisfied that we have *accounted* for this author. Like workmen who finish their job two hours before they should because they have started half an hour earlier, we can move on with a clear conscience - we are ahead of the game. To a certain extent this practice is unavoidable. But when the essentially private experience of the artist is wilfully converted into the universally-owned banal formulae by which creativity and subtlety are overwhelmed then art degenerates into discourse.

Saul Bellow's adoption in most recent times of the novella form appears not only as a reaction against endless external noise, but as a confirmation that our minds are ill-equipped, or ill-disposed , to cope with the full artistry of the novel. It appears to certify that the private sphere which we allocate (or do not allocate) to ourselves for a consideration of what were once spoken of approvingly as the 'humanities' has shrunk nearly to vanishing point. In its very make-up the novella reflects a drawing in of the reins, a condensation of experience, a journey inwards and inwards. It is not a particularly encouraging view, but few would argue that it is unrealistic. When things are pared down to essentials like this, there is so much that seems superfluous. Thus it is that the author of such weighty tomes as T*he Adventures of Augie March* and *Humboldt's Gift* can advance the following view:-

...in my early years I wrote more than one fat book. It's difficult for me now to read those early novels, not because they lack interest but because I find myself editing them, slimming down my sentences and cutting whole paragraphs.[1]

Bellow crystallizes the problem for the modern writer; a diagnosis which is well worth quoting at length:-

What I do say is that we (we writers, I mean) must cope with a plethora of attractions and excitements - world crises, hot and cold wars, threats to survival, famines, unspeakable crimes. To conceive of these as 'rivals' would be absurd - even monstrous. I say no more than that these crises produce states of mind and attitudes towards existence that artists must take into account [...] The modern reader (or viewer, or listener: let's include everybody) is perilously overloaded. His attention is, to use the latest lingo, 'targeted' by powerful forces [...] True, we are at liberty to think our own thoughts, but our independent ideas, such as they may be, must live with thousand of ideas and notions inculcated by influential teachers or floated by 'idea men' advertisers, communications people, columnists, anchormen, et cetera. Better-regulated (educated) minds are less easily overcome by these gas clouds of opinion. But no one can have an easy time of it [...] A part of every mind, perhaps the major portion, is open to public matters. Without being actively conscious of it, we somehow keep track of the Middle East, Japan, South Africa, reunified Germany, oil, munitions, the New York subways, the homeless, the markets, the banks, the major leagues, news from Washington; and also, pell-mell, films, trials, medical discoveries, rap-groups, racial clashes, congressional scandals, the spread of AIDS, child murders - a crowd of horrors. Public life in the United States is a mass of distractions. By some this is seen as a challenge to their ability to maintain internal order. Others have acquired a taste for distraction, and they freely consent to be addled.[2]

Like so many Kenneth Trachtenbergs, our heads abuzz with vicarious experience, we may turn to our most private being and discover only wreckage and debris. The novel cannot, under present conditions, compensate for this gap. Its terms of reference are different from those in which we are steeped in everyday life; it appeals to faculties which are eroding ever more quickly. The novel is not 'important'. To conceive then of the novella as a kind of literary 'sound-byte', an artistic equivalent of the empty utterances of the media types whose sole function is to hold our interest for a few seconds, may be going too far. Indeed, the novella could easily be viewed in a positive light, as an art which we can experience in our

lunch break, and which will not interfere with a modern lifestyle. But in the context of Bellow's oeuvre, there seems to me to be something intrinsically sad, not so much in content as in form, in his move towards brevity. It might be characterised as an *acceptance* of the necessity to write short.

The first thing that must be said about the novellas *A Theft* and *The Bellarosa Collection* is that they are not really germane to the present study - namely that of demonstrating the complex dangling nature of the central characters in Bellow's novels. For not only does the form of the novellas limit expression, it also curtails the development of character.[3] And the very insubstantiality of the characters does not permit of any deep exploration of their motives, their traits, their desires and fears. What we have are pale and diluted manifestations of the more vibrant characters of the novels - in effect, a shadow play. True, *Seize the day* is technically a novella. And we have already seen how characters such as Citrine and Corde seem to fade away. But nowhere in either of the novellas is there a character to match the depth and range of Wilhelm's dramatization, nor is there any evidence to show that the concerns of those in the novellas can rival the extent of those of Charlie and Albert. It is perhaps unfair to judge the novellas in the vast shadow of the novels - yet it is virtually impossible not to do so.

In commenting on *A Theft*, Robert Boyers is, I think, correct in his view that "the book is most accurately understood as a work of deliberate self-limitation".[4] But it is difficult to disagree with the judgement of Paul Taylor who complains of the failure "to dramatize [...] the relationships" of the three main characters in *A Theft*.[5] Similarly tough to dispute is the belief of Robert Towers that "instead of a realized work of fiction, *A Theft* suggests only the armature for an uncompleted and much weightier work [...] it serves mainly as a reminder of how much more we have come

to expect from this writer".[6] Boyers himself admits that Clara Velde, the heroine of *A Theft*, "never emits more than vaguely portentous metaphysical noises".[7] And here is the crux of the matter. When a character's experience is tailored to accord with the form of the novella, when we are furnished with the minimum of material on which to base our view, then it would be foolish indeed to award this character a significance or a complexity disproportionate to their status. Do the novellas then signify an end to the 'dangling' of Bellow's central characters? Perhaps - but it would be more accurate to own up that we cannot (and should not) say for certain. For both Clara Velde and the unnamed memory-man of *The Bellarosa Connection* should be distinguished, as far as possible, from the ten previous heroes. Only if Bellow returns to the form of the novel can the above question be answered. In the meantime, the novellas should be viewed as being of interest more in terms of the significance of their form, along the lines argued at the beginning of this chapter, than in terms of the significance of their content.

And yet, for all the fact that Clara Velde represents a diminution of characterisation, she is nevertheless (apart from her sex) a recognisable Bellow protagonist. Glimpsed under the frugal light thrown upon her are the ambiguities which surround and define her existence. In her purest desires, she seems to constitute something of a carry-over from Benn Crader in *More Die of Heartbreak*. For Clara too is in pursuit of the deepest unspoilt love - her "one and only subject"[8] - a woman who believes passionately in the inviolate "Human Pair" forged together by the most genuine of attachments[20]. Her own chosen partner in this "rescue operation"[30] is Ithiel Regler, a kind of watered-down Spangler, "a man who thought world politics continually"[25], in his job as an adviser to power-brokers in Washington. In the terrible decay and isolation of New York, styled apocalyptically as "Gogmagogsville"[12] (although Clara herself seems divorced from the terror,

shut up in her plush Park Avenue apartment), the ring which she had received from Ithiel as a younger woman takes on the proportions of a talisman, warding off the forces of dissolution, and embodying the undying bond between the two. But it is as if their feelings have been stored away with the ring during the intervening years, for not only has Ithiel married, divorced, and had several mistresses, but Clara herself is currently on husband number four, the insensate Wilder Velde, who immures himself in pulp thrillers as an antidote to outside reality ( a reality which, in line with the compression of experience of the novella, is hinted at only in very vague terms - it is from the sense of personal isolation in the story that we *deduce* that outside reality is unaccommodating). Moreover, Clara admits that she had bullied Ithiel into buying her the ring, and then sentimentalized its value[80]. Still, the ring, for Clara, does seem to act as a "life-support"[70], a symbol of an unrealised and unattainable love amidst the compromises and submissions of life, for when it disappears it provokes a personal crisis in her. But on the first occasion that the ring vanishes, Clara does not baulk at vitiating its sentimental purity by making a fraudulent insurance claim, for which she is massively rewarded. Indeed, when she eventually discovers the ring under her bed, she realises that in fumbling for a tissue on her bedside table she had inadvertently dislodged the object. Hints of a dark, even bestial sexuality accompany this revelation - "For what purpose she had been groping now that it was discovered, she did not care to guess"[43]. The second disappearance of the ring, this time stolen by the black boyfriend of Clara's Austrian au pair, actuates the main thread of the story, as Clara searches desperately, not so much for the ring itself, but for signs that a common bond of feeling can still exist between people; that an appreciation of the spiritual value of the jewel, its love-invested significance, can yet be present. As Clara explains to Viennese Gina, who returns the ring with the incongruous aid of Clara's daughter Lucy, her belief is that

although the finest qualities of the soul are smothered, struggling for articulation in Gogmagogsville, they can nevertheless be detected and coaxed out:-

'Let me tell you quickly,' said Clara, 'since it has to be quick, what I've been thinking of the stages a woman like me has gone through in her life. Stage one: Everyone is kindly, basically good; you treat 'em right, they'll treat you right - that's baby time. Stage two: Everybody is a brute, butcher, barbarian, rapist, crook, liar killer and monster. Stage three: Cynicism *also* is unacceptable, and you begin to put together an improved judgement based on minimal leads or certain selected instances.' [105]

Like Crader's Arctic lichens, the spirit can be revived from cold storage, its warmth finding expression in what, for Clara, constitutes a confirmation of her sense that there was "something major in Lucy"[47], and that Gina "was a deep one"[67]. Yet there is much justice in Paul Taylor's acerbic comment that "we are required to interpret this (the return of the ring) as an almost preternatural feat of moral insight",[9] and in his view that "the morals Bellow draws [...] seem [...] so out of scale with the slightness of the story".[10] Taylor suspects a satirical intent on Bellow's behalf, but I think the problem with interpretation lies more in the limits of the novella form. True, Clara is the subject of a gentle humour on occasions - her backwoods 'hellfire and damnation' religion is juxtaposed with the supposed sophistication of her role as a high-fashion queen, and her quest for love in an unfriendly environment is slightly compromised by her tendency to consult the superficial remedies of quack psychiatrists. Moreover, her suicide attempts show her to be somewhat neurotic, and her bizarre eugenics scheme involving her and Ithiel[32] is more than a touch eccentric. But essentially Clara, like Crader, is not to be doubted when it comes to the utterance of her deepest feelings. And herein we find the problem. When Clara comments that she loves Ithiel with her soul[33], or defends the value of personal life ("I never feel so bad as when the life I lead stops being characteristic - when it could be anybody else's life"[83]), or laments the

spiritual poverty of modern man ("I'm beginning to see it [...] as the conduct of life without input from your soul. Essential parts of people getting mislaid or crowded out."[89]), we straightaway recognise the legitimate concerns of the Bellovian protagonist. But these are only lent credence by our knowledge *of what has gone before* in the Bellow canon. In the context of the novella, where there are little or no events to connect with these utterances, such statements seem detached and contrived. The insubstantiality of the characters is directly responsible for this feeling. Lucy, for example, appears as nothing more than an absurd *deus ex machina*. And Ithiel seems to do anything *but* "think world-politics continually". Clara herself is endowed with "an anti-rest character", having too much "basic discord"[90] in her "confused inner life"[48] - a description which one might apply to any of Bellow's dangling men, but which in Clara's case seems only to be an unearned appurtenance. Clara can only provide us with one of those "minimal leads" she herself talked of earlier. We should not hurry into overreactions to *A Theft*, which would have us believe that Bellow's "indignation [has turned into] the acknowledgement of unstoppable decay".[11] Rather, we should realise that the desire for love *is* there in the ambiguous ending which has Clara crying tears of hope for her child and for the realisation of Gina's qualities; and tears of sadness at her failure to pair off Ithiel and Gina, and her own continuing frustration and loneliness. But it is a love which is indeed "down in the catacombs"[73], a fitting repository for the skeletal creatures and events of the novella.

Superior to *A Theft*, but still evincing the same basic traits as its predecessor, is *The Bellarosa Connection*. Paul Ableman's view is that "at the level of ideas, and also of tender character evocation, the present work strikes me as the equal of anything that Bellow has yet written".[12] One can agree with this judgement only up to a point. The novella's central question of what has befallen the Jews in America

is certainly a challenging and controversial one. And in Sorella Fonstein, described as "an Everest of lipoids",[13] we have the nearest thing in the novellas to (excuse the pun) a fully-fleshed out character. The Jewish narrator's presence, however, is very sketchy indeed. Never given a name, he is the founder of the Mnemosyne Institute in Philadelphia, and as such is given a basic Bellovian duality in that his powerful memory acts as both a vitalising *and* debilitating faculty. His philosophy, "Memory is life"[2], could stand as a maxim for numerous Bellow heroes, in particular Tommy Wilhelm. Yet the deadening effects of a highly retentive memory are clear in that the narrator, in the manner of a Herzog or Trachtenberg, has accumulated a "burden of so much useless information"[34]. Using his gifts to train "executives, politicians, and members of the defence establishment"[1] in the logistics of technological capitalism, the narrator would now like to "*forget* about remembering"[2] - at least in so far as that memory involves the excrescences of the bureaucratic-military machine. For, as the years have advanced, he has come to appreciate that it is recollection in the realm of affects which is of prime, indeed *sole*, importance - "I am preoccupied with feelings and longings, and emotional memory is nothing like rocketry or gross national products"[3].

His most moving remembrances are associated with Harry and Sorella Fonstein, and particularly with the latter's attempts to secure a meeting for her husband with the showbiz entrepreneur Billy Rose. Rose (a real person in name though not in his actions) had organised a network in Italy through some Mafia connections, for the purposes of smuggling Jews out of Europe and thus saving them from the death camps. Harry Fonstein was one such fortunate recipient of Rose's attention. Mysteriously, though, Rose refuses to meet with or be thanked by any of those he has delivered. Billy, incidentally, is, like Regler in *A Theft*, a recognisable attenuation of a fuller character that has gone before - this time Valentine Gersbach

(although he also possesses shades of the scarcely more realised Max Detillion in *The Dean's December*). A man with a debased private life ("streaks of sexual weakness, sexual humiliation"[13]) and a chaotic public existence ("he had a bug-like tropism for publicity"[13]), there are nonetheless "spots of deep feeling in flimsy Billy. The God of his fathers still mattered"[13]. The fact that Rose liberated his fellow Jews from the clutches of the Nazis shows that *something* was operating on his obscure soul - but it is something which appears bereft of genuine personal feeling, and more in line with a hideous publicity game (Rose also stages a rally in Madison Square Garden with the theme, 'We will never die'[28]). What emerges is that the Americanization of the Jews appears to have robbed them *of* the personal connection, of the ability to express (in private at least) their deepest emotions. Just as old Artur had mourned the passing of Elya's 'Old system', his 'Old World feelings', in *Mr.Sammler's Planet*, so the Fonsteins speculate on the effects of the New World:-

> The Jews could survive everything that Europe threw at them. I mean the lucky remnant. But now comes the next test - America. Can they hold their ground, or will the USA be too much for them? [65]

Rose's staunch unwillingness to have any kind of personal contact with the rescued, even in the face of Sorella's attempts to blackmail him by exposing his sexual inadequacies, makes the cry "Something is due from every man to every man"[57] seem a forlorn one. Which is why the narrator, in his fond reveries, styles Sorella, in spite of her peccadilloes, as a "higher type"[66], a woman of deep spiritual significance: "In this world of liars and cowards there *are* people like Sorella. One waits for them in the blind faith that they *do* exist"[56]. The narrator's treasuring of Sorella as the means to restore personal values and private emotions to their status as the bridge between human beings is, however, undermined by the fact that he has not seen, nor bothered to contact, either she or Harry for thirty years. In fact, he has

been a millionaire recluse since the death of his wife, a man who "avoid[s] giving [his] unlisted [telephone] number"[74]. *His* personal connection has been severed, so that in many ways he all too closely resembles Billy Rose. Real people merely form part of his mind's dreamscape:-

> Maybe the power of memory was to blame. Remembering them so well, did I need actually to *see* them? To keep them in a mental suspension was enough. They were a part of the permanent cast of characters, in absentia permanently. There wasn't a thing for them to do. [67]

Though the narrator denies being an assimilationist, he admits he is "an avoider of uncomfortable mixtures"[79], and it is only when his memory begins to fail (if memory is life, then the lack of it is evidently death) that he is shaken out of the chloroformed complacency of his gloriously successful pursuit of the American Dream, and directed towards a recognition of the more durable gifts of his heritage (it should be noted that his memory is *seen* to fail on one occasion when he cannot remember the words to a song, and, more disturbingly, *seems* to fail on the occasion of his belated attempts to contact the Fonsteins - Sorella is described by relatives as aloof and stand-offish, and not at all in the way the narrator pictures her[78]).

Most damaging of all to the narrator's comfort is the nightmare he experiences wherein his futile struggles to extricate himself from a ditch are watched by a sadistic onlooker: "I was being shown - and I was aware of this in sleep - that I had made a mistake, a lifelong mistake: something wrong, false, now fully manifest"[87]. What comes to him is a realisation both of pitiless brutality (of the sort that European Jewry had suffered from) and of the folly of digging *himself* into his own private insulated hole. In his resolve to make good his error, he decides to try to locate the Fonsteins. But instead of a reunion with them, he encounters only the mocking hostility and sinister psychology of the friend of the Fonsteins' son, who

casually informs the narrator that Harry and Sorella have recently been killed in a car smash. Perversely, they were chasing after their mathematical genius of a son, who judged that *his* gifts would be put to best use in the casinos of Atlantic City, the degraded New Jerusalem. Significantly, the ideological interlocutor of the narrator is also a Jew, a representative of nihilistic assimilation, taunting the latter over his "Jewish sentiments"[101]: "People withdraw into themselves, and then they work up imaginary affections. It's a common American condition."[94] (a diagnosis which accurately reflects the narrator's propensities).

We leave the narrator with an elegaic sense of an age fading away, its only station ironically *in* memory, and of his own regret at failing to establish *his own* connection, a thing which must necessarily belong to the past:-

> Suppose I were to talk to him about the roots of memory in feeling - about the themes that collect and hold the memory; if I were to tell him what retention of the past really means. Things like: 'If sleep is forgetting, forgetting is also sleep, and sleep is to consciousness what death is to life. So that the Jews ask even God to remember, "Yiskor Elohim"'. God doesn't forget, but your prayer requests him particularly to remember your dead ...[102]

If the novellas seem the logical extension of the process of character depletion in Bellow's later novels, then it will be equally evident that the central characters of the novellas, although weakened in representation, nevertheless display the same basic ambiguity evinced by their novelistic forebears. As was mentioned earlier, we cannot ultimately group them with their ancestors - but it is interesting that there remains something which is essential and unchanging in Bellow's work. This holds true even in the case of *Something to Remember Me By*, which collects the two novellas and the eponymous short story[14] into one publication. For in this brief tale is crystallised what has increasingly become the typical Bellovian dilemma. As the old narrator reminisces about a particular incident some sixty years before, it

becomes clear that even as an adolescent the dichotomy which defined his life had already been set out. He is torn between the lower, material world of sex and death, and the higher, spiritual world beyond. Unsettled by the dead little girl he encounters on his travels as an errand-boy, and oppressed by the knowledge of his mother's impending doom, his lust ensures that he is snared by an opportunistic prostitute, robbed, and left to struggle comically back through the winter streets of Chicago to discover whether she who bore him is still alive. Throughout his escapade, he persistently gives vent to what has now become a "lifelong absorption in or craze for further worlds".[15] Sentences from an arcane book outline his philosophy:-

> Nature cannot suffer the human form within her system of laws. When given to her charge, the human being before us is reduced to dust. Ours is the most perfect form to be found on earth. The visible world sustains us until life leaves, and then it must utterly destroy us. Where, then, is the world from which the human form comes?
> If you swallowed some food and then died, that morsel of food that would have nourished you in life would hasten your disintegration in death. This meant that nature didn't make life; it only housed it. [193]

He sums up what is revealed to him by these words:-

> They told me that the truth of the universe was inscribed into our very bones. That the human skeleton was itself a hieroglyph. That everything we had ever known on earth was shown to us in the first few days after death. That our experience of the world was desired by the cosmos, and needed by it for its own renewal. [221-222]

before adding the proviso:-

> I do not think that these pages, if I hadn't lost them, would have persuaded me forever or made the life I led a different one. [222]

Attracted to and repulsed by the material world, drawn to yet unable to embrace the spiritual world - this surely is the dangling man reduced to barest constituents. As

the narrator now faces his own death, these alternatives grow ever more stark. And in his valediction there is a tentative appraisal of the value of both worlds, the blandishments of materialism versus the spiritual power of art:-

> Well, they're all gone now, and I have made my preparations. I haven't left a large estate and that is why I have written this memoir, a sort of addition to your legacy. [222]

"It is hard", writes Nicholas Lezard, "to shake off the feeling that Bellow is quietly shutting up shop."[16]

Bellow's very latest publication[17] might seem to confirm this impression. A collection of his essays and non-fiction writing hardly seems to betoken a new direction. But such a book comes as little surprise. For in the options presented to the narrator in 'Something to Remember Me By' we seem to have reached the fictional end point of the gradual narrowing and compression of the dangling process. It appears that from *Herzog* onwards that this aspect of the central characters has become more and more defined by the boundaries of the material and the spiritual.[18] Even other features of the characters' dangling, such as that between a sense of self and a sense of fraternity, seems to have been conducted on this basis. Think of Sammler's or Charlie's longing for brotherhood which perforce belongs to the realm of the immaterial. Or Citrine's and Corde's pursuit of a genuine self which involves ever more nebulous concepts. Is it because the palpability of the characters has slowly lessened that we arrive at this judgement? Or is it because their desires, though unachieved, have headed ever more in the direction of the transcendent and mystical? Perhaps a bit of both. But mainly, I think it is due to the fact that the interests of Bellow himself have been reduced to a very private conception of the world *which might be*, as opposed to the world *which is* - and of this latter he is tired. Not tired in the sense of wishing to leave it as quickly as possible, but in the

sense that it is a world which threatens to explain everything, to rationalise everything, to yield up everything - a gargantuan, fixed and indissoluble weight crushing against the ever-decreasing space for the spirit..

And yet that space is not so small - for it is the only realm in which vast and endless possibilities still exist. It is, I think, fascinating for Bellow because of the inherent mysteries contained in this inner world. A man in his eightieth year might well be fatigued by the external - but be captivated by the immense vistas of the internal. This is not to say that Bellow has collapsed into himself - he is not on a mission of aloofness or exclusivity. Rather, his perspectives emphasise what lies at the heart of all of us. Though these take too mystical a form to be apprehended through 'humanism', they need not be the preserve of only a few. It is something to which we can all address ourselves. The joke about General Eisenhower in *More Die of Heartbreak* is that Ike had "no inner theater corresponding to the European theater of war"[MDH, 44]. Or, as Bellow puts it:-

> We have concentrated with immense determination on what forms us externally, but that need not actually govern us internally. It can only do that if we grant it the right.[19]

And it is this facet of Bellow's fiction, accentuated in his later works, although ever present to some degree, which can help to account for the 'anti-humanist' strain of criticism. Interpreting Bellow's exploration of the inner world solely in terms of flight from the outer leads to an unearned imputation of isolation and rejection to the author. Such analyses are essentially flawed because they operate on the very premises Bellow has warned us against. When confronted in Bellow's fiction by the terrors of reality on one side, which undoubtedly *do* exist, and the irrational, unscientific and 'unrespectable' concepts on the other - 'soul', 'imagination', 'spirit' - about which there is something fundamentally ungraspable, the tendency is to lend

greater weight and significance - greater import - to that which we *know*. After all, we can read about those terrors of reality every day in the papers. It seems clear to me that many critics have paid lip service to an examination of the mysteries of Bellow's fiction, and have conducted their inquiries on a basis which necessarily renders these qualities obscure, absurd or spurious - and consequently the preserve of a *minority*. It should also be clear from the preceding chapters of this study that no Bellow hero is ever divorced from his surroundings, however horrible or sordid those surroundings might be. Many critics may like to wallow in alienation and despair, in the sort of apocalypse-crises generated by the likes of Spangler (and Corde!) but it is not Bellow's way. Dare one say that it is the artistic value of Bellow's works, those terms which belong to the artist - which put these critics off? A politicized criticism is powerless when dealing with true art. In any case, as Bellow has noted, "Candor should not be mistaken for defeatism".[20]

As for the humanist criticism of Bellow, the best of these judges have always been uncomfortably conscious of the weak foundation underpinning their positions. Tony Tanner notes of the fictional heroes that they all "have tasks and journeys unfinished, problems unsolved, resolutions untested. These endings are vivid pictures - momentary gestures of hope , readiness and reconciliation; they are often vibrantly, emotionally 'right' - but from another point of view they could also be called 'conclusions in which nothing is concluded'". Tanner is also uneasy about the style of the language: "At times it seems to be straining too hard, trying to create by sheer richness and intensity of language beliefs and emotions which are not actually there".[21]

And John J.Clayton makes a perceptive comment on *Herzog*: "Bellow has to persuade us of Herzog's potential loving kindness and sociality by *style*".[22] There *is*

a straining of language and style in many of the conclusions to the novels (one thinks particularly of *Seize the Day* and *Henderson the Rain King*), but I view this feature not so much as an attempt of the author to convince us of a particular view, but as adding to the complexity and ambiguity surrounding any interpretation we might make - in effect, a challenge. The desire to demonstrate what might be termed loosely as 'humanistic' qualities (concern for brotherhood, rational progress, lasting self-enlightenment) may very well be present in the heroes. But Bellow has admitted that not only has he not "represented any good men, no one is thoroughly admirable in any of my novels", but, more significantly, that "I often represent men who desire such qualities but seem unable to achieve them on any significant scale".[23] This has become even more the case the more Bellow's fiction has gravitated away from the rational, from the readily apprehensible, and toward the mystical. Essentially, what is revealed to us by Bellow's work is that we must take account of the dangling of his characters, of their ambivalence, of the complexity of their situations and must not try to prescribe for his art. In its texture, in its ambiguity, it remains vibrant, strong and rich in meaning.

If Bellow is truly winding down his fictional enterprise, and if the air of finality permeating his later short works is to be confirmed, what does this say about the author's attitude to his craft? In truth it appears to be as ambivalent as his art itself is ambiguous. In his darker moments, he can state that "the era of the writer as public sage and as dependable informant has ended,"[24] conceding that "here and there I am probably hard to read and I am likely to become harder as the illiteracy of the public increases".[25] Faced with the chaotic eddies of modern public experience, with an endless conveyor-belt of trivia and trash damaging the fabric of existence, and with a 'culture' which actively despises anything which cannot be put to so-called 'practical' use, the portents do not appear rosy. Yet I do not believe for one moment

that Bellow has lost his faith in the power of art. If anything, that faith has grown stronger with the passing years, despite the ostensible message the novellas send to us. For it is only in art that we can find the means to effect the necessary changes in our inward existences, in our penurious spirits. Bellow's argument for the abandonment of the novel is a convincing one:-

> It's perfectly plain that we are astray in forests of printed matter. The daily papers are thick. Giant newsstands are virtually thatched with magazines. As for books - well, the English scholar F.L.Lucas wrote in the fifties: 'With nearly twenty thousand volumes published yearly in Britain alone, there is a danger of good books, both new and old, being buried under the bad. If the process went on indefinitely we should finally be pushed into the sea by our libraries. Yet there are few of these books that might not at least be shorter, and all the better for being shorter; and most of them could, I believe, be most effectively shortened, not by cutting out whole chapters but by purging their sentences of useless words and paragraphs of their useless sentences.' Answer the problem of quality with improved quality - a touching idea, but Utopian. Too late, thirty years ago we had already been pushed into the sea.[26]

but the fact is that this 'touching, Utopian idea' is nonetheless a true one, and the only real answer to bad writing and masses of irrelevant nonsense. If we are to sacrifice the vitality of *Henderson the Rain King*, the pain of *Mr.Sammler's Planet* or the wit of *More Die of Heartbreak* on the altar of public inattention then it is a sad day indeed. I suspect that we have not yet seen the last of Saul Bellow in the novel for the very reason that he too believes in this 'touching, Utopian idea'. For it is only in the novel that the dualities which drive and animate his heroes can properly be represented. It is only the novel that can fully arrest our attention, which can allow of our immersion in what Bellow calls the "quiet zone". In this area we can appreciate the real value of literature, in the essence of what Proust and Tolstoi styled "true impressions":-

> This essence reveals, and then conceals itself. When it goes away it leaves us again in doubt. But we never seem to lose our connection with the depths from which these glimpses come. The sense of our real powers, powers we seem to

derive from the universe itself, also comes and goes [...] The value of literature lies in these intermittent 'true impressions'.[27]

It is these 'true impressions' in the form of their epiphanies of memory, feeling, transcendence and timelessness which flit by every Bellovian central figure from Joseph to Trachtenberg, and provide not only the heroes with a window to the soul, but grant us access too. And it is the action upon this "hounded, mutilated, not wholly obliterated soul"[28] wherein the writer finds his strength. From his view that "what can make a writer truly interesting is an inadmissable resource, something we all hesitate to mention though we all know it intimately - the soul",[29] that he "cultivates certain permanent human impulses and capacities [...] good for the soul",[30] that the writer's job [is] to remind people of [...] the fact [...] that they have souls",[31] Bellow reinforces the belief that "the power of a true work of art is such that it induces a temporary suspension of activities. It lead to contemplative states, to wonderful, and, to my mind, sacred states of the soul".[32] It is a process of inward experimentation, a hesitant rearing of uncertain feelings, a blundering, groping path towards the truth. But the powers of the soul should not be confined to the realms of fiction, for, as Bellow knows:-

There would be no point in continuing at all if many writers did not feel the existence of these unrecognised qualities. They are present and they demand release and expression [...] We must see them in flesh and blood.[33]

Saul Bellow's dangling men are not flesh and blood, but in that contradictory, fluctuating and anomalous area which defines their existence, we may just discover that distilled and indispensible requirement.

References

The epigraphs are, respectively:-
Yeats,WB: 'Vacillation', taken fromW.B.Yeats, *Selected Poetry*, The Penguin Poetry Library, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, 1991, p.175.

Bellow, Saul: 'Something to Remember Me By', published in *Something to Remember Me By*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, 1993, p.200

1 Bellow, Saul: 'Foreword' to *Something to Remember Me By*, p.v.

2 ibid ppvii-ix.

3 This is not to say that short writing inevitably vitiates the complexity of its characters - one thinks, for instance, of some of Poe's or Hawthorne's tales, wherein the narrators/characters are often psychologically very complex - but that in comparison to Bellow's novels, with their characters such as Augie, Henderson and Herzog who are difficult to pin down, the characters of the novellas often seem relatively linear and transparent.

4 Boyers, Robert: 'Losing Grip on Specifics', *Times Literary Supplement*, 24-30, March 1989, p.299.

5 Taylor, Paul: 'Is he trying to be satirical or what?', *Literary Review*, April 1989, pp20-21, (p.21).

6 Towers, Robert: 'Mystery Woman', *New York Review of Books*, 27 April, 1989, p.51.

7 Boyers, 'Losing Grip on Specifics', *T.L.S.*p.299.

8 Bellow, Saul: *A Theft*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, 1989, p.16. All subsequent references appear in the text.

9 Taylor, 'Is he trying to be satirical or what' *L.R.*, p.20.

10 ibid. p.21.

11 Glenday: *S.B.D.H.*, p.183.

12 Ableman, Paul: 'Too Much Freedom', *Literary Review*, November 1989, p.23.

13 Bellow, Saul: *The Bellarosa Connection*, Penguin Books, Harmondswoth, Middlesex, England, 1989, p.55. All subsequent references appear in the text.

14 Bellow has of course published short stories before, collected in *Mosby's Memoirs and other Stories* and *Him with his Foot in his Mouth and other Stories.*

15 'Something to Remember Me By', p.193. All subsequent references appear in the text

16 Lezard, Nicholas: Review of *Something to Remember Me By*, *The Guardian*, 30 November, 1993.

[17] Bellow,Saul: *It All Adds Up: A Non-Fiction Collection*, Secker & Warburg,1994.

[18] This insight came to light in my discussions with Professor Andrew Hook.

[19] Bellow, Saul: 'Saul Bellow on Mozart', *The Guardian*, 2 April, 1992, pp23-24. (p.24).

[20] *Tanner Lectures on Human Values*, ed., McMurrin, pp175-219 (p.213).

[21] Tanner, Tony: *Saul Bellow*, pp105,107-08.

[22] Clayton: *I.D.M.*, p.253..

[23] Lloyd Harper Interview in Rovit, *S.B.C.C.S.*, pp5-19, (both quotes p15).

[24] Bellow, Saul: 'Literature in the Age of Technology', *Harper's*, August 1974, pp48-59, (p.50).

[25] 'Foreword to Bloom's *Closing of the American Mind*, p.15.

[26] 'Foreword' to *Something to Remember Me By*, p.viii.

[27] Bellow, Saul: 'The Nobel Lecture' *American Scholar* 46,(1977), pp316-325, (p.325).

[28] Foreword to Ortega's *Revolt of the Masses*, ppix-xiii, (pxii).

[29] 'A World Too Much With Us', *Critical Inquiry,* 2.1, 1975, pp1-9, (p.8).

[30] *Triquarterly* interview, pp12-34, (p.14).

[31] Epstein, Joseph: 'Talk with Saul Bellow', *New York Times Book Review*,5 December, 1976, pp3, 92-93, (p.92).

[32] Bellow, Saul: 'Interview with myself', *New Review*, 1975, pp53-56, (p.55).

[33] Bellow, Saul: 'The Future of Fiction', in Malin, *S.B.C.*, pp211-220, (p.220).

## Bibliography

A: Fictional Works by Saul Bellow.

*Dangling Man* (1944), Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, 1988.

*The Victim* (1947), Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, 1988.

*The Adventures of Augie March* (1953), Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, 1966.

*Seize the Day* (1956), Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, 1966.

*Henderson the Rain King* (1959), Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, 1965.

*Herzog* (1964), Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, 1965.

*Mr.Sammler's Planet* (1970), Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, 1972.

*Humboldt's Gift* (1975), Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, 1976.

*The Dean's December* (1982), Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, 1982.

*More Die of Heartbreak* (1987), Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England,1988.

*A Theft* (1989),Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, 1989.

*The Bellarosa Connection* (1989), Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, 1989.

*Something to Remember Me By* (1991), Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, 1993.

Please note that the original date of publication in the United States is given in brackets.

B: Essays and Articles by Saul Bellow.

'Distractions of a Fiction Writer' in *The Living Novel: A symposium*, ed., Granville Hicks, Macmillan, New York, 1957, pp1-20.

'The Sealed Treasure', *Times Literary Supplement*, 1 July, 1960 p.414.

'The Writer as Moralist', *Atlantic*, March 1963, pp58-62.

'Some Notes on Recent American Fiction', *Encounter*, November 1963, pp22-29.

'Where do we go from Here: The Future of Fiction', reprinted in *Saul Bellow and the Critics*, ed., Irving Malin, New York University Press, New York, April 1967, pp211-220.

'Machines and Storybooks: Literature in the Age of Technology', *Harper's*, August, 1974, pp48-59.

'Starting Out in Chicago', *American Scholar*, 44.1, (1974-75), pp71-77.

'A World Too Much With Us', *Critical Inquiry* 2.1 (1975), pp1-9.

'An Interview with Myself', *New Review* 2.18, (1975), pp53-56.

'The Nobel Lecture', *American Scholar* 46, (1977), pp316-325.

'A Writer from Chicago' in *The Tanner Lecture on Human values*, ed., Sterling M. McMurrin, Volume 3, Cambridge University Press, 1982, pp175-219.

'Foreword' to *The Revolt of the Masses* by Jose Ortega y Gasset, University of Notre dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana, 1985, ppix-xiii.

'Foreword' to *The Closing of the American Mind* by Allan Bloom, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1987.

'Saul Bellow on Mozart', *The Guardian*, 2 April, 1992, pp23-24.

'Marx at my Table', *The Guardian*, 10 April, 1993, p.23.

'Foreword' to *Something to Remember Me By*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, 1993, ppv-x.

C: Interviews with Saul Bellow.

Bragg, Melvyn: 'Saul Bellow talks about his new novel', *London Review of Books*, 6-19 May, 1982, p.22.

Brans, Jo: 'Common Needs, Common Preoccupations: an Interview with Saul Bellow' in *Critical Essays on Saul Bellow*, ed., Stanley Trachtenberg, G.K.Hall & Co., Boston, Massachusetts, 1979, pp57-72.

Epstein, Joseph: 'A Talk with Saul Bellow', *New York Times Book Review*, 5 December, 1976, pp3, 92-93.

Gray, Rockwell *et al*: 'Interview with Saul Bellow', *Triquarterly* 60 (1984), pp12-34.

Henry, Jim Douglas: 'Mystic Trade: The American Novelist Saul Bellow talks to Jim Douglas Henry', *The Listener*, 22 May, 1969, pp705-707.

Kakutani, Michiko: 'A talk with Saul Bellow: On his work and himself', *New York Times Book Review*, 13 December 1981, pp1, 28-31.

Lloyd Harper, Gordon: 'The Art of Fiction: Saul Bellow' in *Saul Bellow*, ed., Earl Rovit, Prentice-Hall, inc., Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1975, pp5-18.

Robinson, Robert: 'Saul Bellow at 60: Talking to Robert Robinson', *The Listener*, 13 February 1975, pp218-219.

Roudané, Matthew C.: 'An Interview with Saul Bellow', *Contemporary Literature* 25.3, (1984), pp265-80.

Simmons, Maggie: 'Free to Feel: Conversation with Saul Bellow', *Quest*, February-March 1979, pp31-35.

D: Books and articles about Saul Bellow.

Ableman, Paul: 'Too Much Freedom', *Literary Review*, November 1989, p.23.

Axthelm, Peter M.: The *Modern Confessional Novel*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1967.

Banville, John: 'International Tale', *London Review of Books*, 30 March, 1989, p.21.

Botsford, Keith: 'Saul Bellow: Made in America', *The Independent*, 10 February, 1990.

Boyers. Robert: 'Losing Grip on Specifics', *Times Literary Supplement*, 24-30 March, 1989, p.299.

Bradbury, Malcolm: *Saul Bellow*, Methuen, London and New York, 1982.

Bradbury, Malcolm: 'The It and the We: Saul Bellow's New Novel', *Encounter*, November 1975, pp61-67

Clayton, John Jacob: *Saul Bellow: In Defence of Man*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Indiana, 1968.

Cohen, Sarah Blacher: *Saul Bellow's Enigmatic Laughter*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 1974.

Crosland, Susan: 'Bellow's Real Gift', *Sunday Times*, 18 October, 1987, p.57.

De Mott, Benjamin: 'Saul Bellow and the Dogmas of Possibility', *Saturday Review*, 7 February, 1970, pp25-28, 37.

Dutton, Robert R.: *Saul Bellow*, Twayne Publishers, Boston, 1971.

Enright, D.J.: 'Saul Bellow's New Novel: Good exists and cannot wholly be credited to favourable weather', *The Listener*, 1 April, 1982, p.20.

Flower, Dean: 'Fiction Chronicle', *Hudson Review* 35.2, (1982), pp281-286.

Galloway, David: 'Mr.Sammler's Planet: Bellow's Failure of Nerve', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 19.1, (1973) pp17-28.

Glenday, Michael: *Saul Bellow and the Decline of Humanism*, Macmillan Press, Basingstoke, Hampshire, 1990.

Johnson, Diane: 'Point of Departure', *New York Review of Books*, 4 March, 1982, pp6,8.

Jones, Lewis: 'Soul Searching', *The Spectator*, 10 April, 1982, pp21-22.

Josipovici, Gabriel: 'A Foot in the Stockyard and an Eye on the Stars', *Times Literary Supplement*, 2 April, 1982, p.371.

Kalb, Bernard: 'Biographical Sketch', *Saturday Review of Literature* 36, p.13, cited in Rodrigues, Eusebio: *Quest for the Human*, p.73.

Kazin, Alfred: 'Though he slay me', *New York Review of Books*, 3 December, 1970, pp3-4.

Kemp, Peter: 'America's Carnival of Excess', *Sunday Times*, 25 October, 1987, p.66.

Lanchester, John: 'Strong Meat', *London Review of Books*, 11 January, 1990, p.11

Lezard, Nicholas: 'Review' of *Something to Remember Me By*, *The Guardian*, 30 November, 1993

Lively, Penelope: 'Backwards and Forwards - Recent Fiction', *Encounter*, June-July, 1982, pp86-88.

Malin, Irving ed.,: *Saul Bellow and the Critics*, New York University Press, New York, 1967.

Essays cited from Malin:-

Fiedler, Leslie, A.: 'Saul Bellow', 1957, p1-9.
Geismar, Maxwell: 'Saul Bellow: Novelist of the Intellectuals' 1958, pp10-24.
Chase, Richard: 'The Adventures of Saul Bellow: The Progresss of a Novelist', 1959, pp25-38.
Freedman, Ralph: Saul Bellow: The Illusion of Environment', 1960, pp51-68.
Hughes, Daniel: 'Reality and the hero: *Lolita* and *Henderson the Rain King*', 1960, pp69-91.
Klein, Marcus: 'A discipline of Nobility: Saul Bellow's Fiction', 1962, pp92-113.
Aldridge, John W.: 'The Complacency of Herzog', 1966, pp207-210.

Newman, Charles: 'Lives of the Artists', *Harper's*, October 1975, pp82-83, 85.

Newman, Judie: *Saul Bellow and History*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1984.

Opdahl, Keith M.: *The Novels of Saul Bellow*, The Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park and London, 1967.

Porte, M.Gilbert: *Whence the Power? The Artistry and Humanity of Saul Bellow*, University of Missouri Press, Columbia, Missouri, 1974.

Pritchett, V.S.: 'Potato Pie', *New Statesman*, 10 October, 1975, pp442-443.

Rodrigues, Eusebio l.: *Quest for the Human: An Exploration of Saul Bellow's Fiction*, Bucknell University Press, Lewisburg, 1981.

Rovit, Earl, ed.: *Saul Bellow: A Collection of Critical Essays*, Prentice Hall Inc., Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1975.

Essays cited from Rovit:-

Porter, M.Gilbert: 'The Scene as Image: A reading of *Seize the Day*', pp52-71.
Poirier, Richard: *Herzog*, or, Bellow in Trouble', pp81-89.
Siegel, Ben: 'Saul Bellow and Mr.Sammler: Absurd Seekers of High Qualities', pp122-134.

Rushdie, Salman: 'The Big Match', *New Statesman*, 2 April, 1982, p.22.

Saul Bellow Society Newsletter: November 1990, Volume 5, No1.

Saul Bellow Journal, The: Volume 7, No1.

Schraepen, Edmond and Michael, Pierre: *York Notes; Saul Bellow: Henderson the Rain King*, University of Beirut, 1981, reprinted by Longman York Press, Burnt Mill, Harlow, Essex, 1981.

Scott, Nathan A.: *Three American Moralists: Mailer, Bellow, Trilling*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame and London, 1973.

Shattuck, Roger: 'A Higher Selfishness', *New York Review of Books*, 18 September, 1975, pp21-25.

Steers, Nina A.: 'Successor to Faulkner?', *Show* 4 (September 1964); cited in Opdahl, Keith: *The Novels of Saul Bellow*.

Strawson, Galen: 'Professor Crader's Satellite', *Times Literary Supplement* 23-39, October 1987, pp1157-1158.

Sullivan, Walter: 'Where have all the flowers gone: Part II; The Novel in the Gnostic Twilight', *Sewanee Review* 78.4, (1970) pp654-664.

Sullivan, Walter: 'Tears Old and New: Bellow's Rumania and three views of the holocaust', *Sewanee Review* 90.3 (1982), pp484-492.

Tanner, Stephen L.: 'Review of More Die of Heartbreak' in *The Saul Bellow Journal*, Volume 7, No1.

Tanner, Tony: *Saul Bellow*, Oliver and Boyd Ltd., Edinburgh and London, 1965.

Taylor, Paul: 'Pontificating Away in the Spiritual Ice-Age', *Literary Review*, October 1987, pp21-22.

Taylor, Paul: 'Is he trying to be satirical or what?', *Literary Review*, Aril 1989, pp20-21.

Trachtenberg, Stanley ed.: *Critical Essays on Saul Bellow*, G.K.Hall and Co., Boston, Massachusetts, 1979.

Essays cited from Trachtenberg

Penn Warren, Robert: 'The Man with No Commitments', pp11-13.
Podhoretz, Norman: 'The Language of Life', pp14-18.
Maddocks, Melvin: 'The Search for Freedom and Salvation', pp24-25.
Baker, Robert: 'Bellow Comes of Age', pp26-30.
Howe, Irving: 'Odysseus, Flat on his Back', pp30-36.
Stock, Irvin: 'Man in Culture, pp41-48.
Aldridge, John W.: 'Saul Bellow at 60: A Turn to the Mystical', pp49-56.
Boyers, Robert: Nature and Social Reality in Bellow's *Sammler*, pp122-140.
Siegel, Ben: 'Artists and Opportunists in Saul Bellow's *Humboldt's Gift*', pp158-174.

49 Trowbridge, Clinton W.: 'Water Imagery in *Seize the Day*', *Critique* 9, (Spring 1968), pp62-73; cited in Porter, M.Gilbert: *Whence the Power? The Artistry and Humanity of Saul Bellow*.

50 Waterman, Andrew: 'Saul Bellow's Ineffectual Angels' in *On The Novel*, edited by B.K.Benedikz, London, 1971.

51 Wilson, Jonathan: *On Bellow's Planet: Readings from the Dark Side*, Associated University Press, Cranbury, New Jersey, 1985.

E: Bibliographical Information.

Cronin, Gloria L. and Hall, Blaine H.: *Saul Bellow: an annotated bibliography (2nd edtion)*, Garland Publishing Inc., New York and London, 1987.

F: Other works cited in text.

Bierce, Ambrose: *The Enlarged Devil's Dictionary*, Penguin Classics, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, 1987.

Dostoyevsky, Fyodor: *The Brothers Karamazov*, Penguin Classics, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, 1982.

Dostoyevsky, Fyodor: *Notes from Underground*, Penguin Classics, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, 1972.

Huysmans, Joris-Karl: *Against Nature*, Penguin Classics, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, 1959.

James, Henry: *The Bostonians*, Penguin Classics, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, 1988.

Lowell, Robert: *Robert Lowell's Poems: A Selection*, edited by Jonathan Raban, Faber and Faber, London and Boston, 1974.

McIntosh, James ed.: *Nathaniel Hawthorne's Tales*, W.W.Norton and Co., Ontario, Canada, 1987.

Muir, Edwin: *Collected Poems*, Faber and Faber, London, 1963.

Nietzsche, Friedrich: *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*, Cambridge University Press, 1982.

Nietzsche, Friedrich: *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Penguin Classics, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, 1969.

Nietzsche, Friedrich: *Beyond Good and Evil*, Penguin Classics, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, 1990.

Ortega y Gasset, Jose: *The Revolt of the Masses*, translated by Anthony Kerrigan , University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana, 1985.

Oxford Dictionary of Current English, The: Oxford University Press, 1985.

Plato: *The Republic*, Penguin Classics, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, 1955.

Poe, Edgar Allan: *The Complete Poems and Tales of Edgar Allan Poe*, Penguin Classics, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, 1982.

Sartre, Jean Paul: *Nausea*, Penguin Classics, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, 1965.

Steiner, George: *The Portage to San Cristobal of A.H.*, Faber and Faber, London and Boston, 1981.

Stirner, Max: *The Ego and His Own*, translated by Steven T.Byington, Western World Press, Sun City, California, 1989.

Yeats, William Butler: *Selected Poetry*, The Penguin Library, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, 1991.